

**The Texts that Made America:
A Historical Consideration of How Schoolbooks Create Americans¹**

Jason R. Edwards Ph.D.

Pockets of both conservative and liberal thought still question the legitimacy of compulsory public education in the United States. Whatever one thinks or assumes about the establishment of government schools, however, one of the best justifications for them is the necessity for the United States (like all nations) to foster good citizens. Education (and consequently schooling) and citizenship are inextricably linked. A nation cannot remain united without the renewal of cultural ties that bind each new generation to the established country. A nation's system of government cannot continue to function without succeeding generations knowing how the system works. Homelands will not remain culturally identifiable without traditions being successfully passed down to succeeding generations. In other words, education of citizens is so crucial for a nation's survival that most countries ultimately opt to ensure that education occurs by providing it through government schooling rather than leaving the job solely to the whims of parents, churches, media, and popular culture.

One perpetually important component of civic education is the textbooks used to teach it. While the education offered in a classroom cannot be reduced to the texts used there, textbooks do wield substantial influence. Certainly not all teachers but many of them for centuries have

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For those desiring more information on schooling in the United States, I encourage readers to examine some of my earlier works published by the Center for Vision and Values. At times, I borrowed from these works in the production of this piece. The works include: *Educational Leviathan: The Rise of Forced Government Schooling in the United States* (2008); *From Dewey to Obama: A History of Progressive Education in the United States* (2010); and *Fundamentalism and Freedom in the American Public School Classroom* (2008), and *The "School-holm Syndrome: A History of Federal Legislative Involvement in American Schooling* (2012).

frequently even yielded curricular authority to the textbook. Teachers lacking either the subject or pedagogical expertise needed to design and deliver courses typically rely on a textbook to generate course content for them. Likewise, teachers are frequently encouraged to consider themselves merely deliverers of a prescribed curriculum and so dutifully carry out the dictates of the officially adopted textbooks. Additionally, the simple following of provided lesson plans and reading assignments allows teachers to reduce their personal workload by relying on an approved book. For these reasons and others, textbooks do then typically reflect a classroom's educational focus. Consequently, if a large percentage of a nation's classrooms adopt a particular text, one can gain insight into that country's educational system and citizenship training by examining widely adopted texts.

The use of education and schooling in the United States in order to produce good citizens is a long and detailed one, and the importance of the texts used to accomplish this is certainly significant.² There are exactly three textbooks in American history that attained an almost universal usage and are thereby the most influential; these cornerstones are: *The New England Primer*, Webster's blue-back speller, and the *McGuffey Readers*.³

² Over the following pages, a sweeping history of American education will be offered, summarized, and referenced. While I have obviously tried to accurately footnote throughout for specific references, I want to note upfront my reliance on Urban and Wagoner's essential educational textbook, entitled *American Education: A History*, 2nd ed. (NY: Routledge (Taylor & Francis Group), 2009) (now in its fourth printing). Theirs is the work I look to first for essential facts of educational history and one I have relied on so often, the line between their thoughts and my recollection blurs. For those seeking a general history of education I recommend turning to them first. I additionally would like to note a new book that proved very helpful to me for background information: William J. Reese's *America's Public Schools: From the Common School to "No Child Left Behind."* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011). I hope that this book too will enjoy a wide readership in the future.

³ However, before examining these texts designed for classroom use, it should be noted that if one "text" was credited with making the United States, it is unarguably the Bible. More specifically, the Protestant Bible. And, most specifically, the King James translation of the Protestant Bible. The King James Bible was the most widely distributed, most widely referenced, and assumedly most widely read book in the American colonies and the American states for over three hundred years. No book had more influence on American culture and the creations—educational, political, artistic, and theological—of that culture than the Bible. In fact, all three of the key textbooks noted above (and particularly *The New England Primer* and *McGuffey Readers*) can only be understood by recognizing the profound and oftentimes directing influence Scripture played on their authors. If one is open to understanding the impact books had on the United States, one begins by recognizing the impact that the King James Version of the Bible had on America. Furthermore, now that the King James Bible does not have the same marked

The New England Primer, which predates the United States, perhaps makes an ironic beginning for an examination of citizenship, but its significance in both colonial and new republic history demands such attention. First published around 1687 (the exact date is not known), *The New England Primer* dominated education in Massachusetts and ultimately the northern colonies as a whole. The earliest version of the *Primer* is not available, but the basic format survived many decades of reprinting and editions. It most famously contained alphabetic rhymes placed with illustrative pictures to drive home, not just the alphabet, but Protestant teachings. “In Adam’s Fall/We sinned all” pronounced the letter “A” to American youth for generations. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, the Lord’s Prayer, the Apostles’ Creed, and the Ten Commandments were fixtures. Likewise, “An Alphabet of Lessons for Youth” and “Spiritual Milk for American Babes” by John Cotton reinforced reading, memorization, but most importantly, Scriptural teaching of a Calvinist persuasion. The Puritan culture of New England provided one of the most literate cultures in the history of the world, but to understand the *Primer* is to understand that mere literacy was not the sole or primary goal. Rather, content was king. And, that content emphasized submission to God, the imminent dangers of Satan and sin, the necessity of prayer, and the proper treatment of fellow human beings.⁴

The New England Primer delivered this content to America’s youth well into the 19th century. Measuring its influence in statistics is impossible, but one should nevertheless seriously consider the impact of tens of thousands of American youth daily memorizing, drilling, and meditating on these Christian principles and teachings. In regards to citizenship, the *Primer* declared:

role in the American culture or certainly in public schooling as it once did, one can again potentially see the difference a text makes.

⁴ Urban and Wagoner, *American Education*, 43-47.

Duty to God and our neighbour.

LOVE God with all your soul & strength,
With all your heart and mind;
And love your neighbour as yourself,
Be faithful, just and kind.
Deal with another as you'd have
Another deal with you:
What you're unwilling to receive,
Be sure you never do.

Our Saviour's Golden Rule.

BE you to others kind and true,
As you'd have others be to you:
And neither do nor say to men,
Whate'er you would not take again.⁵

Considering such lines in the context of Puritan beliefs is, of course, not surprising; however, when contrasted with the dominant 21st-century understanding of education, the philosophic difference is striking.⁶

In postmodern America, mere functional literacy, not moral content, is the focus. Modern education from cradle to grave centers almost solely on personal goals and desires; “child-centered” education not surprisingly dominates a “self-centered” cultural ethos. While one can cynically question how much memorizing the *Primer*'s catechisms, rhymes, poems, and prayers would really have on an individual, it is harder to question that the *Primer*'s very existence and dominance stands in testimony to the values collectively endorsed at that period of time. Combined with the prominence of the King James Version of the Bible, early American citizenry was well familiar with and institutionally embraced the ideal of the Christian citizen.

⁵ Gary Sanseri and Wanda Sanseri, eds. *The New-England Primer* (Milwaukie, OR: Back Home, 1993), 62.

⁶ More examples from *The New England Primer* are provided in Appendix I.

That Christians made ideal citizens was a commonly held belief by the Founders, who were naturally concerned with how to make the newly formed republic last. Benjamin Rush was perhaps the most direct when he stated:

A Christian, I say again, cannot fail of being a republican, for every precept of the Gospel inculcates those degrees of humility, self-denial, and brotherly kindness which are directly opposed to the pride of monarchy and pageantry of a court. A Christian cannot fail of being useful to the republic, for his religion teacheth him that no man 'liveth to himself.' And lastly, a Christian cannot fail of being wholly inoffensive, for his religion teacheth him in all things to do to others what he would wish, in like circumstances, they should do to him.⁷

Likewise, the passage of the Northwest Ordinance stated, "Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged." This demonstrates the Founders' commitment to moral instruction in order to foster citizenship.⁸

Of all the Founders concerned with education, one name is known particularly for his education—Noah Webster. Like Rush, Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and others, Webster sought ways to support the ideal of bounded liberty that was believed to be necessary for the successful operation of the United States. As Webster's books would often posthumously read, "He taught millions to read, but not one to sin."⁹

Like other Founding Fathers, Webster also concerned himself with creating a truly American culture populated by "republican machines."¹⁰ Webster believed that education was the key for holding a growing number of disparate states together in a perpetual union. For this task, Webster turned to history and implored, "As soon as the child opens his lips, he should

⁷ Urban and Wagoner, *American Education*, 78.

⁸ Urban and Wagoner, *American Education*, 79.

⁹ John Murray, "Noah Webster and the Bee," *Wall Street Journal*, June 4, 2010, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704875604575280822341418854.html> Accessed December 1, 2012.

¹⁰ Jennifer E. Monaghan. *A Common Heritage: Noah Webster's Blue-Back Speller* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1983), 12.

rehearse the history of his own country; he should lisp the praise of liberty and of those illustrious heroes and statesmen who have wrought a revolution in her favor.”¹¹ For Webster, this effort could not start soon enough as he urged parents to “begin with the infant in his cradle; let the first words he lisps be ‘Washington.’”¹²

For all his interest in history, it is, of course, Webster’s work in language for which he is most remembered. Webster began publishing his blue-backed *American Spelling Book* beginning in 1783 and had sold more than 1.5 million copies by 1801 (20 million by 1829, and 75 million by 1875).¹³ After twenty-five years of work, Webster published his *American Dictionary of the English Language* in 1825, and by the middle of the 19th century, the name Webster had been indelibly linked in the American mind with dictionaries. Webster’s linguistic efforts centered on a belief that a distinctive American English would not only help to break with the old culture of England, but again would help unify a disparate nation by eliminating regional distinctions. The blue-backed spellers served this purpose by not only teaching students how to read but also providing them with valuable things to read.¹⁴ His “spellers” did not provide merely a list of spelling words as the name suggests to modern readers; rather, these “spellers” resembled closely the “primers” that predated them in providing religious and patriotic stories designed to become the defining mythology of a nation.¹⁵

¹¹ Urban and Wagoner, *American Education*, 82.

¹² Urban and Wagoner, *American Education*, 82.

¹³ Urban and Wagoner, *American Education*, 83.

¹⁴ See Appendix “B” for some brief representative excerpts from Webster’s blue-back speller.

¹⁵ Historians Robert L. Church and Michael W. Sedlak provocatively claim, in fact, that Webster was ultimately successful in instilling democracy through his spellers and resultant spelling bees. As quoted by Urban and Wagoner, they claim:

The spelling bee dramatized equality: any person of any background could win and children and their parents could prove their ability to “use” language as well as any person of whatever background. That someone in their community could spell a word from the last pages of Webster’s speller assured the people that their village was as good as any other place, whether village or urban cultural center. It also proved that the promises of democracy were real; the most sophisticated and cultured “use” of language, the possession of only the upper classes in despotic Europe, was available to all in America. (Urban and Wagoner, *American Education*, 83).

Obviously, the American Civil War stands as testament that Webster's efforts to unite the people were not entirely successful. Nevertheless, the appeal of his idea certainly survived the war. As historians Wayne Urban and Jennings Wagoner state, "Before the battles had ended, legions of 'Yankee schoolmarms' began to descend upon the South, armed with the Word of God, Webster's blue-backed spellers, and the zeal of latter day Puritans" to make a New England of the South.¹⁶ Likewise, the "common school," which had been created in Massachusetts by Horace Mann for largely the same purpose that Webster had for his texts, was imposed upon seceding states on their return to the Union in order to ensure that civil war never marred the nation again.

Created close on the heels of Webster's dictionaries and spellers is the third and final cornerstone in the pantheon of America's textbook history—Reverend William Holmes McGuffey's *Eclectic Reader* series. First published in 1836, the *McGuffey Readers* peaked in popularity in the closing decades of the 19th century (the two major revisions of the work came in 1857 and 1879).¹⁷ As Americans moved West, the *McGuffey Readers* moved with them instructing each succeeding generation of Americans what a good citizen knew, and even more importantly, how they acted. Like *The New England Primer* and Webster's spellers, the *McGuffey Readers*, which were essentially anthologies of poems, stories, speeches, and essays, provided Americans with uniform experience and very direct instructions on appropriate behavior.¹⁸ While some of *The New England Primer's* endorsements of harsh punishments for sin were removed, readers of McGuffey's works nevertheless still ingested large excerpts from the King James Bible and would be told unequivocally that moral behavior led to future social

¹⁶ Urban and Wagoner, *American Education*, 141.

¹⁷ Elliott J. Gorn, ed. *The McGuffey Readers: Selections from the 1879 edition* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998), 2.

¹⁸ See Appendix "C" for some brief representative excerpts from *McGuffey Readers*.

and financial success, while sin brought isolation and destitution.¹⁹ Historian Elliott J. Gorn states McGuffey's original goal succinctly, "McGuffey attempted to inculcate religion in children, pure and simple."

By the turn of the 20th century, the *McGuffey Readers* had sold in excess of 50 million copies, and since the books were traditionally passed from sibling to sibling and generation to generation, the actual number of students exposed to the book is considered far higher still.²⁰ While McGuffey's purpose may have been straightforward and steadfast, the *McGuffey Readers* themselves cannot be as succinctly generalized, for they were altered through the decades. The original readers written by McGuffey embraced his strong Ohio Valley Calvinist Presbyterian beliefs, but later editions were not written or approved by McGuffey though they still bore his name. Nevertheless, many of McGuffey's original selections did remain throughout later printings. Though somewhat secularized, subsequent texts still reflected Protestant values and an American civic religion of social morals and hard work.²¹ Again, according to Gorn, "The students who read these pages a century ago were invited to engage in an act of faith that education would elevate them morally, refine them culturally, and advance them socially."²² Ultimately, the *McGuffey Readers* worked to make good Protestant Christians, citizens, and workers for the industrial marketplace.²³

When viewed through the lens of the 21st century, a perusal of any of these three volumes will shock not only due to the strong religious content but also to the academic difficulty

¹⁹ Reese, William J. *America's Public Schools: From the Common School to "No Child Left Behind"* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 30-31.

²⁰ The publisher actually claimed that over 120 million copies had been sold, but historians generally no longer accept this figure. Elliott J. Gorn, *The McGuffey Readers* (Boston: Medford/St. Martin's, 1998) 2.

²¹ Gorn, *McGuffey Readers*, 3-13.

²² Gorn, *McGuffey Readers*, 11-13; 29 (quote).

²³ Gorn, *McGuffey Readers*, 3.

contained therein.²⁴ Though each successive volume does get academically easier, even 21st - century college students will not necessarily be comfortable answering questions from these “basic” readers. In fact, the importance of using these texts to grasp the deterioration of academic achievement in the United States today can hardly be underestimated; however, gleaning only this knowledge is not enough. When considering citizenship, perhaps the most notable pattern that emerges is the endorsement of submission to proper authority. The books produced, purchased, and used in the first centuries of American history clearly show a people committed to submitting themselves to an objective truth and legitimate authority. All three volumes noted the ultimate authority is God. While He is the sole focus of *The New England Primer*, Webster’s focus included a shift to America, while McGuffey (and especially later publishers using his name) kept both and additionally added the industrial economy as a legitimate director of human action. Collectively these works contributed to the creation of a civil religion centered on Christianity and the United States (and arguably at times equating the two).

The history of textbooks in the 20th century does not closely resemble the previous centuries in either a philosophic or practical sense. No subsequent textbook has yet achieved even remotely the iconic status of these earlier three in American culture, while Christianity has been steadily removed from the public classroom. Though the *McGuffey Readers* did maintain popularity (particularly in the Midwest and South) into the 20th century, the Progressive Era marks a sea change in American educational history generally and for textbooks specifically.

No era has dominated contemporary educational theory like the Progressive Era. With its call for “scientifically” designed curriculum and instruction along with industrial efficiency in school management, American schools of the 21st century continue to dutifully follow the

²⁴ The three appendices to this paper offer a small snapshot of each work.

dreams and philosophies of early 20th-century Progressives. As Herbert M. Kliebard, however, one of the most noted scholars of Progressive educational history, explains, though lumped together the “Progressives” are not a uniform lot. Kliebard divides them in no less than four disparate groups and uses John Dewey—the patron saint of Progressive Education—to represent, and at times oppose, each of the groupings.²⁵ Nevertheless, despite both subtle and distinct differences within Progressive philosophy, perhaps the most noted unified goal of Progressives was and is the desire to remake society.

Kliebard specifically labels one of his four Progressive groups the “social reconstructionists.” And, when considering both citizenship and textbooks, Kliebard states, “If there was one major success that the social reconstructionists achieved at the school level, it was the large-scale adoption by school districts of a series of social studies textbooks written by...Harold Rugg.” Like seemingly all of the crucial designers of Progressive education, Rugg worked at Columbia University’s Teachers’ College and, as Kliebard states, Rugg wished the conventional subject matter of the 19th century be “swept away and that a new curriculum be developed strictly on the criterion of ‘social worth.’”²⁶ To this end, Rugg relied on a host of “frontier thinkers,” such as John Dewey, Charles Beard, Harold J. Laski, Sidney and Beatrice Webb to identify America’s “social problems” which Rugg would then address in his series of social studies pamphlets and books. Rugg ultimately identified 3000 problems with the United States (though the number was eventually reduced to a mere 300).²⁷ Rugg began mass marketing

²⁵ Kliebard, Herbert M. *The Struggle for the American Curriculum: 1893-1958*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1995). Likewise, Lawrence Cremin begins his classic account of Progressive educators by stating that the “reader will search these pages in vain for any capsule definition of progressive education. None exists, and none ever will; for throughout its history progressive education meant different things to different people, and these differences were only compounded by the remarkable diversity of American education.” Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education 1876-1957* (New York: Vintage, 1964), p. x.

²⁶ Kliebard, *Struggle*, 172.

²⁷ Kliebard, *Struggle*, 174.

his work in 1926 under the title *Man and His Changing Society*, whose very name encapsulates the philosophic shift with earlier textbooks that dominated American society. By 1939, well over one million of his textbooks had sold along with over two and half million workbooks.²⁸

Rugg's work did not take long in drawing critics, but serious opposition did not organize until the American Legion took issue with his work in the 1940s for both patriotic and economic reasons.²⁹ Kliebard argues that it was Rugg's "anti-capitalist theme that eventually brought on the demise of the series."³⁰ One of Rugg's staunchest opponents, Orlen K. Armstrong, argued that the real purposes of the books were:

1. To present a new interpretation of history in order to "debunk" our heroes and cast doubt upon their motives, their patriotism and their service to mankind.
2. To cast aspersions upon our Constitution and our form of government, and shape opinions favorable to replacing them with socialistic control.
3. To condemn the American system of private ownership and enterprise, and form opinions favorable to collectivism.
4. To mould opinions against traditional religious faiths and ideas of morality, as being parts of an outgrown system.³¹

Rugg, his supporters, and some of his "frontier thinkers" all denied the charges and defended Rugg's work as a noble and patriotic effort to improve America. Nevertheless, after 1940 the series quickly faded away as the spirit generated by World War II had little tolerance for a book and author(s) that was open to charges of disloyalty to the American way of life.³²

In contrast with the dominant Progressive educational philosophies, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, President Harry Truman nostalgically praised the *McGuffey Readers*, but despite the

²⁸ Kliebard, *Struggle*, 175.

²⁹ Kliebard, *Struggle*, 177.

³⁰ Kliebard, *Struggle*, 176.

³¹ Kliebard, *Struggle*, 177.

³² Kliebard, *Struggle*, 177-178. For further insight into the "frontier thinkers" listed here that Rugg relied on, see Paul Kengor's book, *Dupes: How America's Adversaries Have Manipulated Progressives for a Century* (Wilmington, DE: ISI, 2010).

onset of the Cold War a serious return to the textbooks of yesteryear was certainly not in the offing.³³ By the mid-20th century, loyal citizenship was a component of increasing federal efforts in education, but no curriculum mandates from the government were handed down to the states and no textbook dominated the scene. Instead, the 1950s marked, most notably with the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954)* decision, another important shift in the focus of American civic education and the production of textbooks through the increasing national focus on civil rights. In fact, the foment of the 1960s over civil rights set the stage for curriculum patterns that dominate the 21st century.

Since the 1960s, textbook-publishing houses and state boards of education have conducted bias and sensitivity reviews of texts in order to ferret out any possible offenses that may be present in textbooks. These efforts largely began in the 1960s and can reflect a healthy recognition that both people of color and women had previously been grossly underrepresented in standard texts, which additionally relied on arguably negative stereotypes when presenting minorities.³⁴ While the original intent of these reviews seem clearly noble, it is difficult not to conclude today that they have long since become outrageous in execution. Diane Ravitch, one of the premier historians of American education, extensively examined the speech codes, guidelines, and philosophies guiding sensitivity reviews of textbooks and found that the only educational materials that can survive in the 21st century are:

Stories that have no geographical location. Stories that have no regional distinctiveness. Stories in which all conflicts are insignificant. Stories in which men are fearful, and women are brave. Stories in which older people are never ill. Stories in which children are obedient, never disrespectful, never get into dangerous situations, never confront problems that cannot be easily solved. Stories in which blind people and people with physical disabilities need no assistance from anyone because their handicaps are not handicaps. Stories in which fantasy and magic are banned. Stories about the past in which

³³ Gorn, *McGuffey Readers*, 32.

³⁴ Diane Ravitch. *The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 31-49.

historical accuracy is ignored. Stories about science that leave out any reference to evolution or pre-historic times. Stories in which everyone is happy almost all the time.³⁵

Furthermore, as Ravitch documents, the operating assumption of sensitivity panels is that “everything written before 1970 was either gender or racially biased.” Ravitch concludes that in “the ideal world of education-think, women would be breadwinners; African Americans would be academics; Asian Americans would be athletes; and no one would be a wife or a mother.”³⁶

In the 21st century, the concern over sensitivity guidelines results in textbook publishers and test makers concentrating more on social imperatives than on actual academic content.³⁷ In regard to textbooks, it is the political left that holds sway with the support of publishers who, as a supervising editor at Holt described, provide “positive pressure groups,” while considering right-wing interest groups “‘censors’ that one finds in ‘totalitarian societies.’”³⁸ This influence has led to a “cultural equivalence” mandate in history texts that “lauds every world culture as advanced, complex, and rich with artistic achievement, except for the United States.”³⁹ As Ravitch explains:

The textbooks sugarcoat practices in non-Western cultures that they would condemn if done by Europeans or Americans. Seemingly, only Europeans and Americans were imperialistic. When non-European civilizations conquer new territories, the textbooks abandon their critical voice. They express awe toward the ancient empires of China, India, Africa, and Persia but pay no attention to how they grew. Textbook after textbook tells the story of the “spread” of Islam. Christian Europe invades; Islam spreads....

The current textbooks are selectively critical. They condemn slavery in the Western world but present slavery in Africa and the Middle East as benign, even as a means of social mobility, by which slaves became family members, respected members of the community, and perhaps achieved prosperity and high office....

³⁵ Ravitch, *Language Police*, 29.

³⁶ Ravitch, *Language Police*, 20 (first quote) and 27 (second quote).

³⁷ Ravitch, *Language Police*, 28.

³⁸ Ravitch, *Language Police*, 92.

³⁹ Ravitch, *Language Police*, 142.

In text after text, we learn that women in non-Western societies enjoyed extensive rights and privileges....Students might well wonder if the United States was the only culture in which women had to fight for equal rights.⁴⁰

When the proposed history standards for *Goals 2000* program were announced in 1994, this same type of anti-American bias created such a firestorm, that the United States Senate rejected them by a vote of 99 to 1.⁴¹

Official Congressional rejection of politically correct curriculum mandates for the nation likely convinced most Americans that the danger of public schools adopting anti-American curriculum had passed. They were wrong. Consolidation of the printing industry and the implementation of economies of scale have left very few competitors to produce American textbooks. And, these few remaining companies generally follow even more politically left guidelines than the ones contained in *Goals 2000*.⁴² At best, textbook companies seek to avoid political controversy by adopting politically correct language that lends itself to incredibly bland prose and a general disengagement with historical realities. Oftentimes both go unnoticed, for unlike normal books that compete for individual readers, textbooks are adopted by entire states through the work of legislatures or bureaucrats.

The prevailing business model also places incredible power in the hands of legislators from large population states (particularly California) for economic necessity dictates that textbook companies must comply with any curricular demands resulting from their regulations. Consequently, rural states are forced to fall in line with urban ones since all of the available

⁴⁰ Ravitch, *Language Police*, 142-143.

⁴¹ Diane Ravitch's *Language Police* contains a chapter on the battle over history standards which includes a brief consideration of *Goals 2000*. For readers wishing a more detailed history of the still influential history standards see Gary Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross Dunn's *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Vintage, 2000). Gary Nash oversaw the creation of the standards and still vehemently defends them against critics on the political Right. As the leader of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Lynne Cheney was the original voice who called for the creation of American History standards but led the fight to have them rejected once she witnessed what had been created. Her work *Telling the Truth* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996) offers a powerful critique of the philosophies that inspired the *Goals 2000* history standards.

⁴² Ravitch, *Language Police*, 92.

curriculum choices were designed with the large population states' demands in mind.⁴³ So, while even such sweeping educational legislation like *No Child Left Behind* allowed for states to adopt their own particular curriculum goals thereby avoiding the *de jure* standardization originally advocated by *Goals 2000*, in effect the nation still has a *de facto* standardization through the textbook adoption process.

As has already been seen through the dominating presence in turn of *The New England Primer*, Webster's blue-backed spellers, and the *McGuffey Readers*, a *de facto* standardization of textbooks is nothing new to the United States. The staggering difference that remains, however, is the content of these works and the logical ramifications of that content. What a nation's citizenry reads largely determines the character and destiny of that nation. Whether one considers the Puritanism of *The New England Primer*, the republicanism of Webster's blue-back spellers, or the industry of the *McGuffey Readers*, the textbooks of America's past capture the essence and spirit of America in earlier ages. Sadly, America's textbooks still do; in the 21st-century American textbooks are politically correct, flat, and incapable of inspiring allegiance or interest in the founding principles of the United States. Politically correct, flat, and disengaged also describe an increasingly large percentage of Americans—a percentage that threatens whether or not the American experiment can survive.⁴⁴

Whether textbooks of the 20th century caused this increasing *ennui* or reflect the demands of a postmodern populace addicted to comfort and distraction does not ultimately matter. What matters is turning the situation around. Fixing America's textbooks will obviously not solve all

⁴³ To demonstrate the increasing challenge this situation will provide, consider the fact that in 2011 California passed state regulations that all California social studies classrooms (K-12) must celebrate the role and contributions of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Americans. When the textbook companies respond to this mandate, all 50 states will end up doing the same thing. See: Jason R. Edwards' *The Bedroom in the Classroom: Clio is Not Amused*, Vision & Values Web site, at <http://www.visionandvalues.org/2011/08/the-bedroom-in-the-classroom-clio-is-not-amused/>.

⁴⁴ See Charles Murray's *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960 – 2010* (NY: Crown Forum, 2012), particularly Parts II and III.

that ill America, her schools, or her reading habits, but the time for assuming the beneficent nature of textbooks has passed. Currently, American textbooks are both a cause and symptom of a deadly civic disease; they need to become part of the cure.

Appendix I: The New England Primer

Selected excerpts from Gary and Wanda Sanseri's reprint of *The New England Primer*.
Pagination references are for the Sanseri edition.

The New England Primer, ed. Gary Sanseri and Wanda Sanseri (Milwaukie, OR: Back Home Industries, 1993).

Rhyming Alphabet: (pp. 43-47)

A In **A**dam's Fall, We Sinned all
B Heaven to find; The **B**ible Mind
C **C**hrist **C**rucified, For Sinners died
D The **D**eluge **D**rowned the Earth Around
E **E**lijah fled, By Ravens fed

An Alphabet of Lessons for Youth (pp. 48-49)

A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.
Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure and trouble therewith.
Come unto Christ all you who labor and are heavy laden and he will give you rest.
Do not the abominable thing which I hate, says the Lord.
Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.
Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.
Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of life that now is, and that which is to come.
Holiness becomes God's house forever.
It is good for me to draw near unto God.
Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.
Keepest thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.
Liar shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone.
Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth them out of them all.
Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.
Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.
Pray to your Father which is in secret; and your Father which sees in secret shall reward you openly.
Quit like men, be strong, stand fast in the faith.
Remember your Creator in the days of your youth.
See a man wise in his own conceit. There is more hope of a fool than of him.
Trust in God at all times, ye people, pour out your hearts before him.
Upon the wicked, God shall rain an horrible tempest.
Value wisdom over gold.
Woe to the wicked, it shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him.

exhort one another daily while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Young men, you have overcome the wicked one.

Zeal has consumed me, because your enemies have forgotten the word of God.

The Shorter Catechism, Agreed upon by the Revered Assembly of DIVINES at *Westminster* (pp. 73-92)

Q1 *What is the chief end of man?*

Ans. Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

Q2 *What rule has God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?*

Ans. The word of God which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify God and enjoy him forever.

Q3 *What do the Scriptures principally teach?*

Ans. The scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.

Q4 *What is God?*

Ans. God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.

Q5 *Are there more Gods than one?*

There is but ONE only, the living and true GOD.

Q10 *How did God create man?*

Ans. God created man male and female after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness and holiness, with dominion over the creatures.

Q13 *Did our first parents continue in the estate wherein they were created?*

Ans. Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the estate wherein they were created, by sinning against God.

Q21 *Who is the redeemer of God's elect?*

The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continues to be God and man, in two distinct natures, and one person forever.

Q33 *What is justification?*

Ans. Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in his sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

Q34 ***What is adoption?***

Ans. Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.

Spiritual Milk for *American Babes*, Drawn out of the Breasts of both Testaments for their Souls Nourishment by John Cotton (pp. 93-100)

Question 1: ***What has God done for you?***

Answer: God hath made me, he keepeth me, and he can save me.

Question 2: ***What is God?***

Answer – God is a spirit of himself and for himself.

Question 3: ***How many Gods are there?***

Answer – There is but one God in three Persons, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Question 4: ***How did God make you?***

Answer – In my first parents holy and righteous.

Question 5: ***Are you then born holy and righteous?***

Answer – No, my first father sinned and I in him.

Question 6: ***Are you then born a sinner?***

Answer – I was conceived in sin, and born in iniquity.

Question 7: ***What is your birth sin?***

Answer – Adam's sin imputed to me, and a corrupt nature dwelling in me.

Question 8: ***What is your corrupt nature?***

Answer: My corrupt nature is empty of grace, bent unto sin, only unto sin, and that continually.

Question 9: ***What is sin?***

Answer: Sin is a transgression of the law.

Question 10: ***How many commandments of the law be there?***

Answer: Ten.

Appendix II: Noah Webster's American Spelling Book

Selected excerpts from Jennifer E. Monaghan's *A Common Heritage: Noah Webster's Blue-Back Speller*. Pagination is in reference to Monaghan.

Jennifer E. Monaghan, *A Common Heritage: Noah Webster's Blue-Back Speller* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1983).

Table XIII – “lessons of easy words, to teach children to read, and to know their duty” (p. 44)

No man may put off the law of God:

My joy is in his law all the day.

O may I not go in the way of sin.

Let me not go in the way of ill men.

And

The wick-ed flee when no man pur-su-eth; but the righ-te-ous are as bold as a li-on. Vir-tue ex-alt-eth a na-tion; but sin is a re-proach to any peo-ple.”

A Moral Catechism – Webster, Noah, *The American Spelling Book* (1798), as reprinted by San Diego State University,
http://edweb.sdsu.edu/people/DKitchen/new_655/webster_catechism.htm.

Question. What is moral virtue?

Answer. It is an honest upright conduct in all our dealings with men.

Q. Can we always determine what is honest and just?

A. Perhaps not in every instance, but in general it is not difficult.

Q. What rules have we to direct us?

A. God's word contained in the Bible has furnished all necessary rules to direct our conduct.

Q. In what part of the Bible are these rules to be found?

A. In almost every part; but the most important duties between men are summed up in the beginning of Matthew, in Christ's Sermon on the Mount.

Of Humility

Q. What is humility?

A. A lowly temper of mind.

Q. What are the advantages of humility?

A. The advantages of humility in this life are very numerous and great. The humble man has few or no enemies. Every one loves him and is ready to do him good. If he is rich and prosperous, people do not envy him; if he is poor and unfortunate, every one pities him, and is disposed to alleviate his distresses.

Q. What is pride?

A. A lofty high minded disposition.

Q. Is pride commendable?

A. By no means. A modest self-approving opinion of our own good deeds is very right. It is natural; it is agreeable; and a spur to good actions. But we should not suffer our hearts to be blown up with pride, whatever great and good deeds we have done; for pride brings upon us the will of mankind, and displeasure of our Maker....

Of Mercy

Q. What is mercy?

A. It is tenderness of heart.

Q. What are the advantages of this virtue?

A. The exercise of it tends to happify every one about us. Rulers of a merciful temper will make their good subjects happy; and will not torment the bad, with needless severity. Parents and masters will not abuse their children and servants with harsh treatment. More love, more confidence, more happiness, will subsist among men, and of course society will be happier.

Of Justice

Q. What is justice?

A. It is giving to every man his due.

Q. Is it always easy to know what is just?

A. It is generally easy; and where there is any difficulty in determining, let a man consult the golden rule—"To do to others, what he could reasonably wish they should do to him, in the same circumstances."

Of Truth

Q. What is truth?

A. It is speaking and acting agreeable to fact.

Q. Is it a duty to speak truth at all times?

A. If we speak at all, we should tell the truth. It is not always necessary to tell what we know. There are many things which concern ourselves and others, which we had better not publish to the world.

Of Charity and Giving Alms

Q. What is charity?

A. It signifies giving to the poor, or it is a favorable opinion of men and their actions.

Q. When and how far is it our duty to give to the poor?

A. When others really want what we can spare without material injury to ourselves, it is our duty to give them something to relieve their wants.

Q. When persons are reduced to want by their own laziness and vices, by drunkenness, gambling and the like, is it a duty to relieve them?

A. In general it is not. The man who gives money and provisions to a lazy vicious man, becomes a partaker of his guilt. Perhaps it may be right, to give such a man a meal of victuals to keep him from starving, and it is certainly right to feed his wife and family, and make them comfortable.

Of Avarice

Q. What is avarice?

A. An excessive desire of gaining wealth.

Q. Is this commendable?

A. It is not; but one of the meanest of vices....

Of Frugality and Economy

Q. What is the distinction between frugality and avarice?

A. Frugality is a prudent saving of property from needless waste. Avarice gathers more and spends less than is wanted.

Q. What is economy?

A. It is frugality in expenses—it is a prudent management of one's estate. It disposes of property for useful purposes without waste.

Q. How far does true economy extend?

A. To the saving of every thing which it is not necessary to spend for comfort and convenience; and the keeping one's expenses within his income or earnings.

Q. What is wastefulness?

A. It is the spending of money for what is not wanted. If a man drinks a dram, which is not necessary for him, or buys a cane which he does not want, he wastes his money. He injures himself, as much as if he had thrown away his money.

Of Industry

Q. What is industry?

A. It is a diligent attention to business in our several occupations.

Q. Is labour a curse or a blessing?

A. Hard labor or drudgery is often a curse by making life toilsome and painful. But constant moderate labor is the greatest blessing.

Q. Why then do people complain of it?

A. Because they do not know the evils of not labouring. Labor keeps the body in health, and makes men relish all their enjoyments. "The sleep of the laboring man is sweet," so is his food. He walks cheerfully and whistling about his fields or shop, and scarcely knows pain.

The rich and indolent first lose their health for want of action—They turn pale, their bodies are enfeebled, they lose their appetite for food and sleep, they yawn out a tasteless stupid life without pleasure, and often useless to the world.

Federal Catechism – Noah Webster, *The American Spelling Book* (1798) reprinted by San Diego State University,
http://edweb.sdsu.edu/people/DKitchen/new_655/webster_catechism.htm.

Q. What is a constitution of government?

A. A constitution of government, or a political constitution, consists in certain standing rules or ordinances, agreed upon by a nation or state, determining the manner in which the supreme power shall be exercised over that nation or state, or rather how the legislative body shall be formed.

Q. How many kinds of constitutions are there; or in how many ways may the sovereign power be exercised over a people?

A. Constitutions are commonly divided into three kinds; monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy.

Q. Explain the sorts of government.

A. When the sovereign power is exercised by one person, the constitution is a monarchy. When a few rich men, or nobles, have the whole supreme power in their hands, the constitution is an aristocracy. When the supreme power is exercised by all the citizens, in a general meeting or assembly, the constitution is a democracy.

Q. What are the faults of despotic governments?

A. In a despotic government, a whole nation is at the disposal of one person. If this person, the prince, is of a cruel or tyrannical disposition, he may abuse his subjects, take away their lives, their property, or their liberty.

Q. What objections are there to aristocracy?

A. In an aristocracy, where a few rich men govern, the poor may be oppressed, the nobles may make laws to suit themselves and ruin the common people. Besides, the nobles, having equal power one with another, may quarrel and throw the state into confusion; in this case there is no person of superior power to settle the dispute.

Q. What are the defects of democracy?

A. In democracy, where the people all meet for the purpose of making laws, there are commonly tumults and disorders. A small city may sometimes be governed in this manner; but if the citizens are numerous, their assemblies make a crowd or mob, where debates cannot be carried on with coolness and candor, nor can arguments be heard: Therefore a pure democracy is generally a very bad government. It is often the most tyrannical government on earth; for a multitude is often rash, and will not hear reason.

Q. Is there another and better form of government than any of these?

A. There is. A representative republic, in which the people freely choose deputies to make laws for them, is much the best form of government hitherto invented.

Q. What are the peculiar advantages of representative governments?

A. When deputies or representatives are chosen to make laws, they will commonly consult the interest of the people who choose them, and if they do not, the people can choose others in their room. Besides, the deputies coming from all parts of a state, bring together all the knowledge and information necessary to show the true interest of the whole state; at the same time, being but few in number, they can hear arguments and debate peaceably on a subject. But the great security of such a government is, that the men who make laws, are to be governed by them; so that they are not apt to do wrong willfully. When men make laws for themselves, as well as for their neighbors, they are led by their own interest to make good laws.

Q. Which of the forms or kinds of government is adopted by the American States?

A. The states are all governed by constitutions that fall under the name of representative republics. The people choose deputies to act for them in making laws; and in general, the deputies, when assembled, have as full power to make and repeal laws, as the whole body of freemen would have, if they were collected for the same purpose.

Appendix III: The McGuffey Readers

Selected excerpts from Elliot Gorn's *The McGuffey Readers*. Pagination references, Gorn's work.

The McGuffey Readers, ed. Elliot J. Gorn (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998).

"Things to Remember," Lesson 25, in *McGuffey's Third Eclectic Reader*, ed. William Holmes McGuffey (New York: American Book Company, 1879). (Gorn pp. 115-116).

1. When you rise in the morning, remember who kept you from danger during the night. Remember who watched over you while you slept, and whose sun shines around you, and gives you the sweet light of day.
2. Let God have the thanks of your heart, for his kindness and his care; and pray for his protection during the wakeful hours of day.
3. Remember that God made all creatures to be happy, and will do nothing that may prevent their being so, without good reason for it.
4. When you are at the table, do not eat in a greedy manner, like a pig. Eat quietly, and do not reach forth your hand for the food, but ask some one to help you.
5. Do not become peevish and pout, because you do not get a part of every thing. Be satisfied with what is given you.
6. Avoid a pouting face, angry looks, and angry words. Do not slam the doors. Go quietly up and down stairs; and never make a loud noise about the house.
7. Be kind and gentle in your manners; not like the howling winter storm, but like the bright summer's morning.
8. Do always as your parents bid you. Obey them with a ready mind, and with a pleasant face.
9. Never do any thing that you would be afraid or ashamed that your parents should know. Remember, if no one else sees you, God does, from whom you can not hide even your most secret thought.
10. At night, before you go to sleep, think whether you have done any thing that was wrong during the day, and pray to God to forgive you. If any one has done you wrong, forgive him in your heart.
11. If you have not learned something useful, or been in some way useful, during the past day, think that it is a day lost, and be very sorry for it.

12. Trust in the Lord, and He will guide you in the way of good men. The path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.
13. We must do all the good we can to all men, for this is well pleasing in the sight of God. He delights to see his children walk in love, and do good one to another.

William Ellery Channing, "Religion the Only Basis of Society," in Lesson 93, *McGuffey's Fifth Eclectic Reader*, ed. William Holmes McGuffey (New York: American Book Company, 1879). (Gorn pp. 151-152).

1. Religion is a social concern; for it operates powerfully on society, contributing in various ways to its stability and prosperity. Religion is not merely a private affair; the community is deeply interested in its diffusion; for it is the best support of the virtues and principles, on which the social order rests. Pure and undefiled religion is to do good; and it follows, very plainly, that if God be the Author and Friend of society, then, the recognition of him must enforce all social duty, and enlightened piety must give its whole strength to public order.
2. Few men suspect, perhaps no man comprehends, the extent of the support given by religion to every virtue. No man, perhaps, is aware how much our moral and social sentiments are fed from this fountain; how powerless conscience would become without the belief of a God; how palsied would be human benevolence, were there not the sense of a higher benevolence to quicken and sustain it; how suddenly the whole social fabric would quake, and with what a fearful crash it would sink into hopeless ruin, were the ideas of a Supreme Being, of accountableness and of a future life to be utterly erased from every mind.
3. And, let men thoroughly believe that they are the work and sport of chance; that no superior intelligence concerns itself with human affairs; that all their improvements perish forever at death; that the weak have no guardian, and the injured no avenger; that there is no recompense for sacrifices to uprightness and the public good; that an oath is unheard in heaven; that secret crimes have no witness but the perpetrator; that human existence has no purpose, and human virtue no unfailing friend; that this brief life is everything to us, and death is total, everlasting extinction; once let them *thoroughly* abandon religion, and who can conceive or describe the extent of the desolation that would follow?
4. We hope, perhaps, that human laws and natural sympathy would hold society together. As reasonably might we believe that were the sun quenched in the heavens, *our* torches would illuminate, and *our* fires quicken and fertilize the creation. What is there in human nature to awaken respect and tenderness, if man is the unprotected insect of a day? And what is he more, if atheism is true?
5. Erase all thought and fear of God from a community, and selfishness and sensuality would absorb the whole man. Appetite, knowing no restraint, and suffering, having no solace or hope, would trample in scorn on the restraints of human laws. Virtue, duty, principle, would be mocked and spurned as unmeaning sounds. A sordid self-interest

would supplant every feeling; and man would become, in fact, what the theory in atheism declares him to be,—*a companion for brutes*.

Thomas Jefferson, “Political Toleration,” in Lesson 67, *McGuffey’s Sixth Eclectic Reader*, ed. William Holmes McGuffey (New York: American Book Company, 1879). (Gorn pp. 152-153).

During the contest of opinion through which we have passed the animation of discussions and of exertions has sometimes worn an aspect which might impose on strangers unused to think freely and to speak and to write what they think; but this being now decided by the voice of the nation, announced according to the rules of the Constitution, all will, of course, arrange themselves under the will of the law, and unite in common efforts for the common good. All, too, will bear in mind this sacred principle, that though the will of the majority is in all cases to prevail, that will to be rightful must be reasonable; that the minority possess their equal rights, which equal law must protect, and to violate would be oppression. Let us, then, fellow-citizens, unite with one heart and one mind. Let us restore to social intercourse that harmony and affection without which liberty and even life itself are but dreary things. And let us reflect that, having banished from our land that religious intolerance under which mankind so long bled and suffered, we have yet gained little if we countenance a political intolerance as despotic, as wicked, and capable of as bitter and bloody persecutions. During the throes and convulsions of the ancient world, during the agonizing spasms of infuriated man, seeking through blood and slaughter his long-lost liberty, it was not wonderful that the agitation of the billows should reach even this distant and peaceful shore; that this should be more felt and feared by some and less by others, and should divide opinions as to measures of safety. But every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle. We have called by different names brethren of the same principle. We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists. If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this Union or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated; where reason is left free to combat it. I know, indeed, that some honest men fear that a republican government cannot be strong, that this Government is not strong enough; but would the honest patriot, in the full tide of successful experiment, abandon a government which has so far kept us free and firm on the theoretic and visionary fear that this Government, the world’s best hope, may by possibility want energy to preserve itself? I trust not. I believe this, on the contrary, the strongest Government on earth. I believe it the only one where every man, at the call of the law, would fly to the standard of the law, and would meet invasions of the public order as his own personal concern. Sometimes it is said that man cannot be trusted with the government of himself. Can he, then, be trusted with the government of others? Or have we found angels in the forms of kings to govern him? Let history answer this question.

Let us, then, with courage and confidence pursue our own Federal and Republican principles, our attachment to union and representative government.

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