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15 The Challenges of Writing 'First Draft History'

The Evolution of the 9/11 Attacks and their Aftermath in School Textbooks in the United States

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We are fast approaching the tenth anniversary of the terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, DC that occurred on September 11, 2001. While the long-term effects of those attacks are still unclear, there can be no doubt that they continue to influence the political ethos, decisions, and controversies in the United States and other nations. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have not ended, the Patriot Act is still in effect, and security at airports remains heightened. There are a plethora of 9/11-related court cases still being argued, and in Congress and the executive branch, there is sharp debate about what post-9/11 policies should be maintained and which should be changed.

But much has changed in the years since the attacks occurred. The United States has a new president, and a profound economic crisis has taken center stage in the minds of many citizens and political leaders. Recent opinion polls in the United States show that while terrorism is still considered a top issue for the government, the worsening economy and high unemployment rate are considered paramount. Specifically, in 2002, 83 percent of adults participating in a Pew poll said that 'defending the US against terrorism' should be a top government priority and 71 percent said 'strengthening the economy' should be in that category too. By 2009, 85 percent placed the economy in the top priority category, and 76 percent gave that billing to terrorism. What is notable here is that concern about terrorism is still high – it has not fallen off the political radar screen. Even though there has not been a major terrorist attack in the United States since 2001, the impact of 9/11 still reverberates throughout American society.

Because 9/11 was such a major event in US history, it would be reasonable to expect that it would quickly become part of official instantiations of American school curriculum, such as state and district adopted textbooks. And if the curriculum followed the political polls, this focus would have staying power. Did that occur? And more importantly, precisely what do textbooks say about terrorism, 9/11, and its effects? Given that these events are not very far in the past, it is quite possible that representations in textbooks published shortly after 2001 have not stood the test of time as new details and evidence emerge and events

continue to unfold. Very little about 9/11 is 'settled,' especially policy questions about what should be done with respect to terrorism. Are textbooks presenting these controversies? Or are they following a more traditional pattern of treating the 'past' as settled business?

This chapter focuses on these questions by presenting findings from a study of how best-selling secondary social studies textbooks published in the United States in 2004/5 (the first to fully include 9/11 content) and their later editions published in 2009/10, deal with 9/11 and the war on terror. Examining the content of textbooks, and more precisely, how they change over time, is instructive for a variety of reasons, but chief among them is the well-documented way in which the school curriculum is an important site for contestation about which narratives should reign supreme in a society. This is not a new phenomenon in the United States, nor is it by any means unique to the United States. In fact, recent incidents in Japan, Russia, and China (e.g. Finn 2007; French 2004; Onishi 2007) seem to indicate that textbooks these days are structured even less by historians and the historical record and more by politics in the form of national history standards and the nationalistic narratives that appear in approved textbooks (Suh and Yurita 2010; Zajda 2003).

In the United States, there is no one set of national history standards that drives textbook structure, but textbook publishers tend to weigh some states' standards more heavily than others. States such as Florida, Texas, and California constitute the engine of the textbook market because of the vast number of textbooks that are purchased by schools in these states. This market power impacts the history that students in other states find represented in their textbooks (McKinley 2010a; 2010b). In the current debate over the approval of new Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) standards by the Texas State Board of Education, approved textbooks will focus more on the specifics of the 'conservative resurgence of the 1980s and 1990s, including Phyllis Schlafly, the Contract with America, the Heritage Foundation, the Moral Majority, and the National Rifle Association' (TEA 2010: 6) than the presidency of native Texan George W. Bush, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, or the status of those being held as enemy combatants at Guantanamo Bay, none of which are specifically identified in the standards. If approved, these standards will be in place for the next ten years. As most schools replace textbooks every six years at a minimum, students from across the country could be limited by this version of the past for quite some time.

It has always been difficult to write history as it is still evolving. In the case of the 9/11 attacks and subsequent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, it has been especially difficult, not only because of the intense controversy that surrounds these events, but also because of the ever-shifting national rhetoric around the war on terror. How do we teach students about issues and events that many people do not agree upon? How do we teach about or present the history of events that are so recent and so unresolved? And how are textbook companies to respond?

9/11 and the War on Terror in Social Studies Texts

In the summer of 2005 we began to study exactly how textbook companies in the United States responded to the 9/11 attacks in their high school social studies textbooks published between 2004 and 2006 (Hess, Stoddard, and Murto 2008). We analyzed nine of the top-selling textbooks: three United States history texts; three world history texts; and three United States government and law texts (see Table 15.1). In particular we focused on how the attacks of 9/11 and the US response to these attacks were presented in the books, in terms of both the content and the rhetoric, and we examined the nature of the intellectual work students were asked to do with this content. We were particularly interested in whether or not anything controversial was raised in the text regarding either the attacks or the US response, and we examined whether or not the textbooks structured any tasks that would engage students in deliberation or analysis.

This chapter first highlights our findings from the initial study and then explores how textbooks' representations of these events have evolved over the past six years, especially in response to ongoing events in the war on terror (e.g., Guantanamo, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Patriot Act). This new analysis focuses in particular on how the latest editions of social studies texts with 2009–2010 publication dates present the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent war on terror and how these representations reflect shifting national rhetoric and policies. Our

Table 15.1 Selected textbooks

2005 study	Publisher	2010 study
American history		
<i>American Odyssey</i> (2004)	Glencoe / McGraw Hill	
<i>America: Pathways to the Present</i> (2005)	Pearson / Prentice Hall	
<i>The Americans</i> (2005)	Houghton Mifflin / McDougall Littell	<i>The Americans</i> (2010)
World history		
<i>World History: Connections to Today</i> (2005)	Pearson / Prentice Hall	
<i>World History: Patterns of Interaction</i> (2005)	Houghton Mifflin / McDougall Littell	
<i>World History</i> (2005)	Glencoe / McGraw Hill	<i>World History</i> (2010)
US Government/Law		
<i>U.S. Government: Democracy in Action</i> (2006)	Glencoe / McGraw Hill	
<i>MacGruder's American Government</i> (2005)	Pearson / Prentice Hall	<i>MacGruder's American Government</i> (2009)
<i>Street Law: A Practical Course in Law</i> (2005)	Glencoe / McGraw Hill	

analysis includes a side-by-side comparison of the changes made to new editions of three textbooks that we analyzed in the original study, with one book selected from the high school US history category, one from the world history category, and one from the government category.

Five major themes emerged during our initial analysis of high school social studies textbooks drawn from both the representation and description of the 9/11 attacks and the war on terror, and from how the textbooks asked students to engage intellectually with this content in any included tasks (Hess, Stoddard and Murto 2008).

Lack of Detail

Overall, the 2005 textbooks provide very little factual detail of the 9/11 attacks. Five of the nine books do not even identify who the attackers were, and one provides simply a generic 'terrorists opposed to US policies.' This seems odd, given the frequency and prominence of the events in the texts. More than half of the texts do not specifically explain what happened on 9/11, who was involved, or why it happened. This is especially true in the government and law texts, which contain virtually no description of the events despite including them frequently as examples.

9/11 as an Unprecedented Attack

Even though they lack detailed descriptions of what happened, what was clear in the 2005 texts is that 9/11 was a significant and critical event, an 'unprecedented attack,' not only for the US but also for the world. We found that the textbooks included the events of 9/11 and the war on terror prominently in their texts, with US history texts often adding special sections on these topics and government texts using examples of the 9/11 attacks and, in particular, examples from issues that arose from the response to the attacks (e.g., the Patriot Act, Guantanamo Bay, civil liberties). The central message in these texts is also that the events of 9/11 united the world against terrorists in spirit and, in the case of Afghanistan literally, as allies in the war on terror.

Nationalistic Rhetoric

The images and rhetoric used in texts, and in the US history texts in particular, emphasize heroism and tragedy related to 9/11 as well as depict the US as the victim of an unprecedented attack. The evidence used in structuring the largely nationalistic narratives in these texts is often limited in perspective. The person quoted most often was then President George W. Bush. Glencoe's *World History* (2005) includes portions of his address to the nation after 9/11, in which he states, 'Freedom and fear are at war. The advance of human freedom, the great achievement of our time and the great hope of every time, now depends on us ...' (2005: 968). Although four of the nine texts included the war in Iraq, only one text, *The Americans* (2005), identified the fallibility of the evidence used to

justify the invasion of that country by the US and its allies (e.g., weapons of mass destruction).

Conceptual Confusion

We found many disparities in how concepts such as terrorism are defined and utilized across the books, with different books providing different definitions and examples of other terrorist attacks that even contradicted the conceptual material. For example, several of the texts' (*American Odyssey*, *Democracy in Action*, *Glencoe World History*) definitions of terrorism state that terrorist acts are those waged against civilian populations but then proceed to include the bombing of the US naval warship, the USS Cole, and the attacks on US Marine barracks in Beirut in the 1980s as examples of terrorist attacks.

Little or No Controversy

Finally, we found that despite the many controversial and debatable issues surrounding the 9/11 attacks and the war on terror, including the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and domestic policies such as the Patriot Act, the textbooks present few as being at all controversial. Additionally, students are not asked to do much critical higher order thinking with this material, nor are they invited to engage with the material through open questions or deliberations. We found that the government and law textbooks, as a group, included more issues presented as open, meaning that the issues have multiple and competing legitimate answers or perspectives; however, most assessment items and tasks in the texts present issues as closed and engage students in lower order tasks such as defining terms contained in the textbook or questions for which students could copy answers directly from the text to sufficiently answer the question.

Rewriting the 9/11 Attacks and the War on Terror

In order to compare the representations of 9/11 and the war on terror with new editions of popular texts (those with publication dates of 2009 and 2010), we selected a subset of texts from the earlier sample that have produced new editions and conducted the same analysis.¹ We scanned the index and narrative of each text for particular key words used in the first study (e.g., September 11th, Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden) and also looked directly in the same sections that we had coded for the first study. In all three of these new editions, the locations of the information related to 9/11 and the war on terror were relatively similar. The substance of and content within these sections, however, have evolved to present a very different history of the 9/11 attacks, their impact on the US and the world, and the response of the US domestically and in the war on terror. These comparisons and the major themes that emerged from the comparative analysis are presented below.

Table 15.2 Comparison of descriptions of the 9/11 attacks in *The Americans*

<i>The Americans</i> (2005, p. 1100)	<i>The Americans</i> (2010, p. 1100)
Explosions and raging fire severely weakened the twin towers. Within two hours after the attacks, both skyscrapers had crumbled to the ground. One wing of the Pentagon was extensively damaged. About 3,000 people were killed in the attacks. They included all the passengers on the four planes, workers and visitors in the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and about 300 firefighters and 40 police officers who rushed into the twin towers to rescue people. The attacks of September 11 were the most destructive acts of terrorism in modern history.	Explosions and raging fire severely weakened the twin towers. Within two hours after the attacks, both skyscrapers had crumbled to the ground. One wing of the Pentagon was extensively damaged. About 3,000 people were killed in the attacks—the most destructive acts of terrorism in modern history.

Still Little Description of What Happened

Despite many additions and updates in content related to the 9/11 attacks and the war on terror, there is still little description of the actual 9/11 attacks. In fact, *The Americans* (2010) removed descriptions of the specific groups who were victims of the attack (see Table 15.2).

Much of the description of the 9/11 attacks, the war on terror, and the war in Iraq is still relegated to special sections in the back of *The Americans*, and while the events are referenced throughout the government text, it is often with little detail or context.

World History did the greatest reorganization by moving a large section about the war on terror from its 'Contemporary Western World' chapter to its 'Africa and the Middle East' chapter. In this way, the center of the war on terror is physically removed from America and symbolically placed in the Middle East. It is also, however, the only text of the three that did add a small amount of detail about the 9/11 attacks (although the details are more clarifications than expansions). For example, the section now frames Osama bin Laden more prominently and as directly responsible for the attacks, changes the numbers killed in the attack to 'almost 3000' from 'thousands,' and correctly identifies the location of the Pentagon as being in Arlington, Virginia rather than Washington, DC (2010: 945). Although a few details were added, the overall lack of detail is striking and problematic. The context for the response to the attacks is not fundamentally set for students to make connections between the events because there is not enough detail or because of where the sections are placed within the book.

No More Heroes

One striking change is the shift in rhetoric; the tone of the textbooks in the 2005 study generally frames the United States as grand victim, simultaneously emphasizing the heroism surrounding 9/11, while more recent textbook narratives around 9/11 have

struck the bland tone that marks many traditional textbooks. In *The Americans* (2010), references to Father Mychal Judge, the New York City Fire Department chaplain who was killed during the attack, were removed, as was reference to specific groups who helped on the scene such as the ironworkers who helped with the recovery (2005: 1101). The revised edition also removed much of the emotional rhetoric that immediately followed the attacks. For example, a sentence in the 2005 textbook reads, 'People felt that everything had changed—life would never be the same. Before the attacks, many Americans felt secure that terrorism happened only in other countries' (2005: 1102). The removal of this sentence is significant in that it indexes a shift in the way that national shock was described.

In addition to the narrative rhetoric, 9/11-related images were also less prominent in the new additions. For example in *MacGruder's*, the image of the giant US flag and flag-waving crowd at a 2001 football game that was used as the cover image for the 'Foreign Policy and National Defense' chapter (2005: 466) was replaced by an image of former President Ronald Reagan and former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Margaret Thatcher walking past a military honor guard (2009: 480–481). Several other 9/11-related photos were also removed, thereby reducing the iconic nature of 9/11 that existed in the earlier text. Similarly, a preview section in the final chapter entitled 'A Time for Heroes,' in the 2005 *World History* that included a picture of firefighters and rescue workers in rubble along with personal stories of heroics (2005: 968) and a picture of a New York fireman (2005: 890) located in another chapter were removed from the new edition.

Justification for War and the WMDs?

At the time of the original analysis, only one of the texts in the study, *The Americans* (2005), asserted that weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) had not been found in Iraq, stating 'by mid-2003, chemical or biological weaponry had not been found' in Iraq, despite the fact that 'Much of the case for going to war against Iraq was based on the belief that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction' (2005: 1105). The texts in the first study not only avoid any criticism of the war in Iraq, as it was in its infancy, but they also fail to recognize the various groups who were opposed to the war or who questioned the justification provided for it. These new editions go much further in raising criticisms of the actions of the Bush administration, including the administration's justifications for and execution of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as domestic policies.

The updated 2010 edition of *The Americans* describes the fallout that resulted from a lack of WMDs in Iraq, recognizes the discontent over the war and those who were against it, and includes the collusion of the British as well by referencing the 'Downing Street memo.'

In May 2005, a top secret memo known as the Downing Street memo became public. It suggested that the Bush administration had planned to invade Iraq as early as July 2002 ... In June, as U.S. casualties continued to rise, a majority of polled Americans supported withdrawal from Iraq.

(2010: 1105)

The updated edition of *Glencoe World History* (2010) also raises the issue of the missing WMDs, stating ‘No weapons of mass destruction were found’ (2010: 766). However, the textbook also shortened the section describing how the war began, shifting the burden from the UN, which was prominently featured as the failed mediator with Saddam Hussein’s regime, to then President George W. Bush as a form of personal mission. Along with the reorganization of information on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, new sub-headings are also used in both of these chapters and illustrate the more critical stance on the events: ‘Bush and 9/11’ (2010: 944) and ‘Post-9/11: The War on Iraq’ (2010: 1001).

Unlike the two history texts, *MacGruder’s* does not raise the issue of the missing WMDs, although it does acknowledge in a photo caption that ‘President George W. Bush plans preemptive combat operations against Iraq in reaction to reports of the stockpiling of weapons of mass destruction’ (2009: 415). However, no specific reason is given in the narrative of the text, unlike the earlier text that includes the threat of WMDs as justification for invading Iraq (see the side-by-side comparison of these paragraphs with the major changes in bold in Table 15.3). In the new edition, the justification of war based on WMDs in Iraq is removed, along with several other examples of historic congressional resolutions to send the US Military to fight without officially declaring war that were previously in the same section, including the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.

The invasion of Iraq is again referred to later in *MacGruder’s*, but the reason given is solely democracy building, not as a response to a threat of weapons of mass destruction or terrorism: ‘In 2003, the United States led an invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein’s brutal dictatorship in Iraq. The United States ... is committed to building a democracy amid the strife and sectarian violence there’

Table 15.3 Comparison of the descriptions of reasons for invading Iraq in *MacGruder’s*

<i>MacGruder’s</i> (2005, p. 402)	<i>MacGruder’s</i> (2009, p. 416)
In 2002, Congress agreed that President Bush should take whatever measures were “necessary and appropriate” to eliminate the threat posed by Saddam Hussein and his Iraqi dictatorship. It was widely believed that that regime had amassed huge stores of chemical and biological weapons and was seeking to become a nuclear power – all in direct violation of the Gulf War’s cease-fire agreement. In March 2003 a new (but smaller) international coalition, led by the United States, launched Operation Iraqi Freedom – a well-executed military campaign that ousted Saddam Hussein and his government from power. Some 140,000 American troops remain in Iraq today, engaged in the difficult and often dangerous tasks of stabilizing and rebuilding that country.	Most recently, in 2002, Congress agreed that President George W. Bush should take whatever measures were “necessary and appropriate” to eliminate the threat posed by Saddam Hussein and his Iraqi dictatorship. In March 2003, an international coalition, led by the United States, launched Operation Iraqi Freedom – a military campaign that ousted Saddam Hussein and his government from power. Some 140,000 American troops remain in Iraq today, engaged in the difficult and often dangerous tasks of stabilizing and rebuilding that country. President Obama has declared that “our combat mission in Iraq will end by August 31, 2010” and that “all U.S. troops [will leave] Iraq by the end of 2011”.

(2009: 664). Here again there is a decided focus on the current events in Iraq rather than the history of the events, thereby reflecting current hopes and realities – not the historical record.

More Controversy and Perspectives

Although some controversial aspects of the war on terror were removed in the revisions, such as the WMD justification in *MacGruder’s*, the texts overall raise more issues about domestic and foreign policies and the response to the 9/11 attacks and part of the war on terror. The rhetoric in the texts also shifts from one of nationalism and heroism to a more traditional textbook tone, albeit with a somewhat critical perspective on the war in Iraq and the Bush administration domestic policies in particular.

At the beginning of several chapters, *MacGruder’s* (2009) adds a number of point-counterpoint quotes from differing perspectives that raise important issues explored in the corresponding chapters. For example, at the beginning of its section on ‘Expanding Presidential Powers’ a sub-heading of ‘Perspectives’ is followed by a description of the issue of the warrant-less wiretap program by the NSA (National Security Agency) that was directed by President Bush. It states that ‘acting in secret’ President Bush directed the NSA to ‘monitor communications between people in the United States and suspected terrorists. Under current law, the NSA must obtain a warrant from a federal court in order to conduct spying activities within the United States. The President defended his actions as necessary to protect the American people from harm’ (2009: 404). This description is then followed by quotes on the program from pro-con perspectives of then Attorney General Alberto Gonzales and Federal District Court Judge Anna Diggs Taylor, respectively. Although it is not completely clear that students would have enough information in the text to fully deliberate the issue, students are asked in the assessment tasks at the bottom of the page to identify the nature of the issue and the perspectives on that issue. Students are also asked, ‘Which of the positions do you think most appropriate? Why?’ *MacGruder’s* (2009) also adds student tasks into the text that require them to examine multiple documents and perspectives in order to analyze and evaluate the issue.

Both *The Americans* and *World History* also raise controversial elements of the Iraq war in their updated editions, especially the justification for it described above, as well as historic connections to the conflict. *World History* includes a section on unrest in the Middle East in the 20th and 21st centuries and the connections to the West. It also includes tasks that ask students to weigh evidence and answer higher order and critical evaluation questions such as ‘How is the unrest in the Middle East connected to terrorist attacks against the United States?’ (2010: 1002). These new versions do not directly add much detail about the 9/11 attacks, but they do provide much more context and detail about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the connections to US domestic and foreign policies presented in response to the 9/11 attacks.

To summarize, what the newer versions of the three textbooks include about terrorism, 9/11, and its aftermath are notably different than what was in their

previous editions. Of course, some changes should be expected in newer editions of textbooks (in fact, they are demanded by US copyright laws), but it would have been possible to write the narrative differently without demonstrably changing the tone and central message. This was not the case. The newer textbooks are less nationalistic, do not focus attention on instances of heroism, broaden the perspectives of how the topics are portrayed, and include controversial issues related to how to respond to terrorism.

Discussion and Implications

Virtually all of the changes identified above strike us as laudable in comparison to what was in the earlier texts. In fact, in our previous writings about the earlier texts, we offered strong critiques of the narratives in many of the texts because they were blatantly nationalistic, factually misleading or outright wrong, avoided authentic political controversies, and were generally banal (Hess, Stoddard and Murto 2008; Hess 2009; Hess and Stoddard 2007). It is certainly not the case that all of the problems we noted with the older editions of the textbooks have been corrected, and it is also important to recognize that the analysis we have just presented of the new editions is based on three books, while the earlier analysis was based on nine. It may be that if newer editions of the other six books that are available were analyzed we would learn that the changes in these three do not mark a trend.

It is also important to point out that there are some parts of the new books that should have been changed and were not – creating even more opportunities for misunderstanding for students than with the earlier editions. In particular, given that the young people reading these new editions will have been too young to remember 9/11 well (if at all), the lack of detail about what happened on 9/11 that we first noted in the earlier textbooks is arguably a more significant problem now than in the past. We frequently hear from teachers that 9/11 is really 'ancient history' to the high schools students who will be reading these textbooks. They remind us that their students were likely in preschool when it occurred. Consequently, as one teacher recently remarked, 'teaching about 9/11 is not all that different than teaching about Pearl Harbor.' This illustrates that as an event recedes in the past, it becomes more important for textbooks to include specific information about relatively basic (although, by no means, simple) questions, such as what happened, to whom, for what reasons, and with what effects.

There are a number of possible explanations for why the 9/11 content in the textbooks is lacking in detail. One is that the authors are just not paying attention to the reality that their readers were so young when 9/11 occurred. Another is that providing detail about an attack on the US would convey a sense of the nation's vulnerability to the readers. Yet another is that textbooks are simply limited in the space they are allotted and therefore have to make decisions about what is more significant. Regardless of the actual explanation, the effect is extremely problematic.

While journalists are often deemed the writers of the 'first draft' of history, we think what is written about recently occurring events in textbooks falls into this same category. Because competition in the US textbook market is fierce and for school districts, hugely expensive, one way publishers advertise their history books is to emphasize how 'up to date' they are – after all, such books will not have to be so readily replaced if they stretch the meaning of 'history' to include contemporary events. Moreover, even though evidence suggests that most history teachers rarely get to the 1960s, much less to 2001, there are some teachers who really do try to reach contemporary events in survey history classes. Texts with such events will appeal to them and their students. This inclusion of important recent historic events such as the 9/11 attacks will also surely expand as they are included in updated state social studies standards and standardized tests. These factors combine to exert pressure on publishers to include narrative about events that are as up to date as possible. Of course, this is even more important for textbooks that are used in government or civics courses, where the expectation to deal with contemporary events is fairly standard. On its face, including contemporary events in textbooks seems like a good idea, but the findings from this study raise concerns about whether the costs of such an approach outweigh the benefits.

The problem, of course, is that 'first draft history' is often incomplete, and sometimes proves to be outright false. This is true for what is produced by journalists, but even more likely to be the case for the kind of 'first draft history' that appears in textbooks. Journalists are clearly also pressured by market forces, which explains why there was such a distinct difference between how the mainstream media in the United States covered 9/11 and its aftermath compared with media in many other nations. But the pressure on journalists pales in comparison to those facing textbook companies, which may be simultaneously being pushed in different directions by various stakeholders including company shareholders, special interest groups, state departments of education, and political think-tanks (Cornbleth and Waugh 1995). This pressure from multiple and competing interest groups, along with the fact that American society in general could not agree on what happened and why, explains why the narrative of 9/11 in textbooks was so bereft of the controversies that were actually on the public's platter within just a few years after 2001. This absence could simply be a matter of curriculum lag, the oft-noted tendency of 'official' school curriculum to be 'behind' representations that occur in other places (such as in the academy). It may just take curriculum a bit of time to catch up – especially textbooks that are only revised every five years or so (Issitt 2004).

But, of course, the ability for textbooks to 'catch up' assumes there is only one true narrative to chase. This is a very different representation of history than presenting it as contested terrain. Others have documented that one of the problems with many history textbooks is that they are literally 'ahistorical' in their portrayal of what constitutes history (Paxton 1999). Historians know that the field is ripe with debate, the questions that appear settled can become unsettled as new evidence emerges, or as the sensibilities of contemporary times warrant different interpretations than were done in the past. But in most history textbooks history is presented as 'what happened.' Teachers generally support this view of a textbook

as an objective account through the ways they are used in classrooms (Stoddard 2010). This is problematic generally, but especially so for contemporary events when there is such potential for misinformation – after all, if you are presenting a narrative as 'true' then it is dangerous if it turns out to be wrong. Given that concern, perhaps it is better to not include contemporary events in history textbooks. Or, when contemporary events are included, they could be presented as still evolving and open to interpretation instead of reflecting unwarranted or value-laden claims that reflect contemporary politics more than the emerging historical record.

Although some dismiss the importance of textbooks in shaping students' knowledge of the past, in many schools districts and for many teachers, textbooks continue to be the coin of the curricular realm (Issitt 2004). Even though there is a wealth of curriculum materials available about terrorism, 9/11 and its aftermath (Hess and Stoddard 2007), it is likely that the role of textbooks as major curriculum resources and organizers will remain. Our findings here suggest, however, that perhaps history textbooks in particular should not attempt to include events still evolving or ongoing. Given the nature of the historical narratives in textbooks (authorless and static), the issues of writing first draft history are exacerbated as they do not allow for ongoing developments or new and differing interpretations. Perhaps textbook publishers should provide a window of time for historians to have a better sense of events before including them in texts. They could provide online materials that can be more easily updated – or teachers could rely more heavily on supplemental curriculums that are often available for free and are better able to adapt to new developments. This solution may also provide multiple and competing perspectives to be integrated into the curriculum from various sources instead of relying on the apolitical and seemingly neutral textbook accounts.

Conclusion

The challenge of writing about contemporary and ongoing events in textbooks, however, goes beyond even the issue of working with ever-changing information and circumstances. It is also apparent in these texts and the striking changes in rhetoric of *how* the events are presented in the five or six years between editions, that textbooks are heavily influenced by the dominant social and political views of the period in which they are written. This is not surprising. Textbooks both reflect the views of the time and cement them. This explains why there are often such heated battles about what should be in textbooks – there is a strong sense that their content matters, both symbolically and concretely. With respect to how textbook content about 9/11 and its aftermath has changed in the past five years, it is apparent that the dominant narrative has changed to reflect views in the world outside of school.

Of course, another solution to the problems with 'first draft history' that we have identified is for textbook authors to include more content about the controversies related to contemporary events. If the narrative focuses on different views about the issues embedded in contemporary events and less on describing what happened as if there were no controversies, then it is less likely that students will be misled. Moreover, such a focus could provide an excellent opportunity

for students to engage in the kind of analysis and evaluation of competing perspectives on contemporary issues that has long been advocated as a powerful form of democratic education. The changes in the second round of the history books illustrate vividly that one of the problems with the earlier editions was the absence of the recognition of issues or enough information about the issues for students to thoughtfully deliberate on them. However, this scenario is unlikely as textbooks still remain one of the most official forms of the curriculum and as such are prisoner to the often politicized and problematic nature of the history and social studies standards that guide their development (Van Hover, Hicks, Stoddard and Lisanti 2010). Until a solution to the textbook dilemma is found, the best suggestion may be for teachers to select their curriculum and content from a variety of sources, including the available textbooks, to expose students to multiple perspectives on the past and recent past and ask them to begin to interrogate and reflect upon the multiple versions that they encounter.

Note

- 1 This study represents an initial exploration into how 9/11 and the war on terror have evolved in social studies textbooks. Therefore, we selected a sample from the available new editions that included one text from each content area (e.g., US history, government) that also represented each major publisher used in the initial study (e.g., Glencoe).

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