

Standardized Individualism:

*An Exploration of Attitudes on 'American Exceptionalism' and 'Global
Citizenship' in American Education*

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Spring, 2013

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor Dr. Kari Jensen who tirelessly abetted and encouraged me with my research and writing. I would also like to thank those on my honors thesis committee, Dr. Zilkia Janer and Dr. William Mangino, for their donated time and sincerest support, and to my friend Dr. John Sturtridge for his selfless assistance. Finally, I thank my sister Kari Rivara and my brother-in-law David Sturchio for their dedicated hours of listening, reading, editing, and revising, and their love and enthusiasm for seeing me succeed.

I. Introduction

After the attacks against the US on September 11, 2001, it seemed that very few Americans¹ were genuinely asking *why*? Instead, we accepted that the motive was a general hatred for our country and jealousy of our freedoms. While it is reasonable to expect that a country in complete shock might initially accept such an explanation, many Americans rallied for vague and bloody vengeance long after the attacks. The public's consent to invade not only Afghanistan but also Iraq is a primary example of this impulse; this is particularly striking when considering a majority of Americans were unable to locate either country on a map (National Geographic 2006, 8). Three months prior to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, upwards of seventy percent of Americans supported the war because they believed Saddam Hussein was personally involved with the attacks on 9/11 (Shenkman 2008, 4). Not only had Americans overlooked the lack of supporting evidence, but they also ignored the views held by the greater global community. On the eve of the war, millions around the world protested in what were recorded as the largest anti-US rallies ever held (Walgrave and Rutch 2010, xii). But according to the Program on International Policy Attitudes, only thirty-five percent of Americans recognized that the planned invasion received much more criticism than support around the world (Shenkman 2008, 6).

Following this US-led invasion, Americans proceeded to behave as if their nation were not at war. Rather than considering the human and economic costs of war, Americans, now separated from the conflict, went shopping. As encouraged by their

¹ Despite the existence of North, Central and South America, the US has claimed sole ownership over the distinctiveness of being "American." While I recognize that such a term is geographically ambiguous and a symptom of the perceived exceptionalism discussed in this paper, for the purposes of this thesis I will be using that word to classify ONLY US citizens.

president, Americans kept the store lines long, enjoyed lower taxes, and busied themselves with the imperative to watch reality TV—an instrument that reinforces consumption through the wealth of its celebrities. Beyond the static of mind-numbing capitalist entertainment, hundreds of thousands of people were facing their own violent deaths alongside confused, embittered American soldiers, while millions more witnessed the complete dislocation of their societies and livelihoods. Despite the carnage, Americans were not compelled to meaningfully engage in the inconvenient question, *why*. And why would they? Those in the Middle East² were halfway around the world and largely perceived as uncivilized; could you imagine living in a world without six televisions tuned in to *Survivor*? But alas, survival has become the gross reality of people in places like Baghdad, where the origins of modern day medicine, algebra, and intellectualism can be traced. Ironically, these true relics of civilization have been undermined and demolished by the very society that blindly shares in its profits.

Educational reformer John Dewey warned us that in a consumer society, voters would be disengaged from their responsibilities as citizens given the available distractions, and therefore vulnerable to manipulation. With 24/7 shopping and around-the-clock corporate televised news and entertainment, Americans are completely engrossed in a consumer society that marginalizes critical thinking and intellectual creativity. Despite the ubiquity of information in today's society, people have ceased to be critical consumers of this information, instead deferring to the spectacle of distraction

² I use the term 'Middle East' instead of the geographically accurate 'southwest Asia' in order to avoid confusion. But while 'Middle East' is the more commonly recognized term to Western audiences, I do recognize that it is inherently Euro-American-centric in that it insinuates a location *East* of Europe and America rather than referring to the region in and of itself.

that surrounds us. And yet, there may be one place to rest our hopes in generating a more informed and engaged citizenry: the American public high school.

This hope is the focus of my research on secondary education—specifically the subject of history. This thesis is designed to examine US citizens’ sentiments of individualism and American exceptionalism, and analyze how history textbooks communicate these self-proclaimed values. Overall, it appears that America has assumed a position of superiority; it feels naturally entitled to its status, wealth, and imperialistic power. Likewise, its citizens adhere to this creed and microcosmically embrace a sense of individualism over collectivism. I argue that mainstream history textbooks build and feed such individualist and “exceptionalist” views. The validity of this concept is based on my research of American textbooks and other pertinent literature, as well as my own experiences and observations. It is additionally substantiated by interviews I conducted with school administrators, teachers, and student teachers who all represent their own experiences and insights.

The goal of my thesis is to determine why Americans distance themselves ideologically from the rest of the global community. While I recognize there are many contributing factors to this phenomenon, such as geography, media, and family influences, I focus on public education because it is a relatively decentralized, non-corporate system that many Americans experience while young and impressionable. Despite the diversity among and within states, the standardization of curricula, as well as the market-based production and distribution of textbooks makes it possible to evaluate the general content of high school history courses. It is for this reason that I focus on

history textbooks, as well as the implications of standardized testing and bureaucratic influences that limit critical thinking in the classroom.

The consequences of a nation that feels naturally entitled to imperial power can be dire—for both itself and the world over. With its people prioritizing individualism over collectivism while glorifying a consumer culture, there is little incentive to think critically about the greater global implications of its actions. While the classroom could be a space for engagement in such discussions, I argue that the way history is presented is not inclusive; it does not compel students to draw connections between their individual lives and historical precedent, specifically regarding the achievements of collective agency. Mainstream history textbooks, which are typically used in conjunction with state educational standards, are largely written from an ethnocentric or Euro-American perspective. They omit or sanitize peoples' social movements and global affairs in a way that makes this type of learning non-inclusive. As a result, students feel disconnected from historical events and are thus passive in applying past lessons to present realities. I believe that if educators were not pressured to produce test scores or had access to the proper resources, young people would be more likely to think critically about the world around them and identify themselves as global citizens.

II. Epistemology and Methodology

My evaluation of American exceptionalism and global citizenship cannot be separated from my personal ideologies. Undeniably, my purposes for writing this thesis are inherently influenced by my worldviews, and to suggest otherwise would be functionally dishonest and illusory. However, I do not believe this action-oriented form of academic work is discrediting. Every researcher's views are founded somewhere; there is no *a priori* bias. I recognize my role as an active agent in compiling and conducting research, and I believe I must be conscious of my social situatedness in order to promote the social change that my research demands (Jensen and Glasmeier 2010, 82).

Furthermore, removing the researcher from the research can create an "us and them" dynamic, within which the researcher does not connect him or herself to the subject and consequently omits intrinsic human qualities (variables) like ethics and emotions.

Appropriately, this is the same epistemological deficiency I challenge in the pedagogy of history. Student learning cannot accurately be represented by a score on a standardized test; students cannot be expected to identify with their surrounding global community if they are not required to personally invest themselves in the study of history. Students who learn from observations and experiences can typically contribute more to critical thinking and problem-solving than those who are told what to think about and how to think about it (Jensen and Glasmeier 2010, 85).

Neither students in general nor the proposals made by this research can be characterized solely by statistical representations. Investigating my country's overall positions has compelled me to look not only outward but also reflexively inward. This has informed my understanding of social research in that it cannot only be a continuation

of normativity, but it must also invite different perspectives in conjunction with quantitative research. In qualitative research, such perspectives evoke an intrinsically unique dynamic that is used to construct context and build new theory rather than reaffirm existing theory (Jensen and Glasmeier 2010, 85). The application of qualitative methodology to my thesis has compelled me to reflect on my own identity within the context of American exceptionalism and global citizenship. While the tendency throughout this paper is to attempt objectivity by depicting Americans as ‘they,’ I have found that ‘we’ is a much more appropriate designation in that it takes on a less disconnected and accusatory tone, reaffirms the importance of community over individualism, and most importantly, acknowledges that global citizenship is a subject of growth for me as well. My understanding of the world is continuously evolving, and what I do understand I attribute primarily to my teachers (not my own unique set of ideals). Educators I have encountered have taught me how to be a critical thinker and to respect my role as a citizen, both of the US and of the world. While I am eternally grateful for their influence, I have retrospectively realized their professional limitations. Unfortunately, my teachers were burdened with the expectations and dictates of US educational policies that are married to the textbook and testing industries. The metric of success in the current system comes in the form of both grades and profit reports, not necessarily production of thoughtful citizens.

While at Hofstra University, I inducted that many of the international students had a firmer grasp on true American history than did the Americans, including me. One particularly enlightening moment came when I learned about US interventionist history. I felt absolutely cheated and embarrassed; my international peers knew more about my

country's history than I did. Had I not been granted the opportunity to attend college, I would have graduated high school at the top of my class and yet without any real understanding of such a significant role my country played in the world. My college experience was indeed revelatory, but it left me with a profound wondering as to why I had not learned these facts and ways of thinking that were so common among my international peers when I was in high school.

I have applied discourse analysis to my research as a way of making knowledge more locatable. According to French philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault's concept of discourse analysis, discourses are governed externally, internally, and through control of accessibility. Discourse is governed "'externally' through the prohibitions of speech, divisions between reason and madness, and oppositions of truth and falsehood"; "'internally' policed through the application of commentary and ritualized discussion"; and "'access' is controlled via speech rituals, societies of discourse, doctrine, and social appropriation." These 'rules' for discourse interlock in ways that affect societies' communication of ideas and norms (Berg 2009, 217). Similarly, the information we receive from textbooks is influenced by these rules of discourse: truth and falsehood (mythologies), ritualized discussion (patriotism), and control over accessibility (oligopolization of the textbook market). The consumer of a text is positioned by the text, and thus the discourses become constructed, but for these constructed discourses to attain power, other sources of dialogue must be silenced (Berg 2009, 216-217). I decided to include the voices of educators as a way of identifying these silences and broadening the discussion.

I chose the items in my literature review as a result of my positionality, and yet also as a way of expanding upon my own personal ideals. The authors identify their situational locations and do not attempt to reduce complex concepts into ontological affirmations. These authors have blended their own experiences with empirical data to validate their claims, while offering alternative methods and conclusions. I selected my interviewees for their varying levels of experience, and listed them in the interview section in order of experience from most to least. I also chose my interviewees by consequence of my location; all of the teachers represented in this thesis are based on Long Island or New York City, and so their contributions are limited to their geographic experiences. While most interviews are significantly abridged, the excerpts I include are still relatively lengthy. I provide more details in order to conduct a more thorough discourse analysis and to make it clear to the reader what each participant said and how he or she said it.³ Rather than following a set script to conduct these interviews, I created and followed a general guide to provide a more comfortable setting and foster a more organic, open-ended conversation. Although I had planned to interview the students of each teacher, I was unable to coordinate with the schools and parents to arrange such meetings.

³ While most of the interviews were transcribed voiced recordings, some of the interviews were conducted via email. These emailed interviews will be indicated as such.

III. Literature Review

a. Influence of the Textbook Industry

Brian Rowan's 2006 *The New Institutionalism in Education* gives an enlightening overview of the "School Improvement Industry." As expected, Rowan includes the United States' textbook industry in this category. The textbook industry in the US is extremely concentrated and politically powerful. Today, only six major publishing firms work in the K-12 textbook market and thirty-two states now adopt textbooks on a statewide basis (Rowan 2006, 72-73). Local school systems have become increasingly dependent on these capital-based firms, much more so than the suppliers are to the schools. In fact, school-system budgets trending generally upwards, textbook firms have become particularly interested in exploiting these resources. With an effective monopoly of the textbook market, publishers see no need to be sensitive to unique local school needs, and therefore have been unresponsive to change (Rowan 2006, 68-73); the objective is maximizing profit, not quality education. One example of such publishing firms is McGraw Hill, which serves as the parent company of Standard & Poors (S&P) (McGraw Hill 2013), the financial rating company that downgraded the US federal government's credit rating after giving it AAA ratings consistently. Like S&P, the primary goal of McGraw Hill textbook manufacturing and distribution is to make money, not necessarily to have a positive impact. The same company that was irresponsible with our nation's finance industry by misleading investors over conflicts of interest (Alessi and Wolverson 2013) may be just as reckless with our nation's youth. In contrast with increasing profits siphoned from learning institutions, no noticeable difference in instructional outcomes have arisen over the last decade (Rowan 2006, 68-73).

The school improvement industry also includes standardized testing—a tool of educational “reform” that drains schools of \$1.7 billion every year (Ujifusa 2012). Standardized testing puts pressure on teachers and students to perform at a level determined by the industry and decision-making elite. These actors also determine the content of the test, and thus influence the curriculum. The purpose of this testing coincides with the assumption that our schools are failing and thus in need of reform. However, decades of research confirm that academic performance is directly correlated with socioeconomic conditions; schools are inflected by the communities in which they are embedded, not the other way around (Mangino and Silver 2010). For a better society and a more educated populace, we must address community needs rather than use schools as scapegoats, but this lack of concern for the collective is cyclically reproduced by the standardization of individuals and individualism through monolithic texts and testing.

The kind of instructional outcomes I am evaluating specifically are students’ understanding of global issues and their awareness of America’s positionality in global affairs—something that cannot be fostered solely by textbooks nor determined by standardized testing. Indeed, the primary goal of both the publishing and school improvement industries is profit, not student growth. However, in classrooms, global history is not even part of the curriculum for fifty percent of American students (Franklin and Austin 2011). US history, on the other hand, is generally required throughout most of the country, and results in a narrow perception of America and the international community. Additionally, students are given a biased account of history through their textbooks, one that inevitably informs their global judgments. Such predisposed notions of history provoke an insipid response, if any at all. This occurs because the subject is

decisively presented without room for inclusion or debate, and therefore students take a less active role in participating intellectually. This is most commonly seen in all forms of assessments during which students need only regurgitate the information from texts to tests. These themes are found in James W. Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, although a more accurate title might have been *Lies My Textbook Told Me*. A professor emeritus of sociology at the University of Vermont, Loewen discusses the sheer ignorance of college freshmen and its relationship to the eighteen leading American history textbooks used in US high schools today, all of which he said are essentially "clones" of one another.

Loewen begins by noting that textbooks dominate American history courses more than they do any other subject. These textbooks, typically over 1,000 pages in length, are designed in a way that leads students merely to skim through the text, temporarily memorize hundreds of terms and main ideas for a test, and forget them to clear their synapses for the next chapter. But most importantly, the textbooks leave out anything that might reflect poorly upon America's national character. Loewen argues that the textbooks invoke nationalistic tones and indoctrinate blind patriotism; this is evident in the titles of the texts: *The Great Republic*; *Land of Promise*; *Triumph of the American Nation*; and my own high school US history textbook, *The American Pageant*.

In any American history textbook, one of the first chapters is likely to star Christopher Columbus. US history books portray Columbus as an unprecedented figure and glorify him as America's first great hero. Worth noting is that people from other continents had reached the Americas many times before 1492, and paved the way for Columbus and other European explorers. Anthropologists trace explorers to "America"

back to as early as 70,000 B.C.E., including those from Siberia, Indonesia, Japan, China, West Africa, and others. The ancient Phoenicians and Egyptians sailed at least as far as Ireland and England, reached Madeira and the Azores, and even sailed around the entirety of Africa before 600 B.C.E. In high school history textbooks, Columbus, Prince Henry the Navigator, Amerigo Vespucci, and other Europeans get the credit for such excursions. Not only does this European version of history deny other societies their role in shaping it, but it also gives American students the impression that the rest of the world has not made any contributions to advancements in human history, many of which the students enjoy today. In essence, students do not learn that Columbus's journey was not the first but the last "discovery" of the "Americas" (Loewen 2007, 38-41).

Notably, when textbooks use the word 'discover' to describe Columbus's and other European's explorations, it is inherently misleading and Euro-centric because one cannot discover a land that has already been occupied by civilized nations for centuries. Instead, students are indoctrinated to mindlessly endorse colonialism. They are led to see the world as divided into developed and underdeveloped spheres, whereby their heritage is from the developed "civilized" category, or the technologically and morally advanced. Those outside this construct are considered to be the "other" and deemed "lesser." If studied in their realistic context, Native American societies can easily be judged as *more* civilized than their European counterparts. Most of their cultures promoted equal treatment of women, advanced medical understandings, sustainable environmental practices, equitable distribution of land and resources, and relatively diplomatic relations among each other. In fact, without their assistance, Europeans would have surely died off quickly. Nonetheless, Columbus's journey to the Americas is framed as a tour of

benevolence, de-emphasizing the pursuit of wealth as a motive for coming to the Western Hemisphere. Instead it appears emblematic of our immigrant society that righteously came to America for equality and opportunity, disregarding the pre-existing populations of native societies. The issue is not so much sanitizing Columbus as it is celebrating him for what was ultimately a genocidal, imperialist escapade. Every young mind polluted by this mythology will, if only subconsciously, perpetuate this Euro-American superiority complex—that is, societal respect is entitled to those who exemplify wealth, whiteness, and military strength.

The multi-dimensional flow of ideas between cultures goes unnoticed in US history. Eurocentrism blinds textbook publishers from the contributions made *to* the west, whether by Arab astronomers, African navigators, or Native American social structure. Indeed, even the greatly admired European Enlightenment was inspired by Arab and Asian intellectuals. That so many advancements could be made exclusively by the West is difficult to believe, yet this is the message disseminated by US history textbooks. Specifically, it is through the values of militarism and money worship that the West has found itself in such an exceptional position in the American psyche.

Clearly, US history textbooks are written for (and by) European descendents with little consideration for other cultures and societies. European domination is rarely presented as a question. In fact, most history taught in American high school textbooks is posed as answers, not a series of controversies to be discussed. In this way, imperialism seems natural, as if it is something that does not need to be explained or defended. The same holds true for US imperialism. For example, consider the belief of “Manifest Destiny,” or Americans’ God-given right to occupy the vast land and use its rich

resources between the east and west coastline. When young people learn about westward expansion during the 19th century, the indigenous peoples living in that land are hardly considered; but this is just the beginning of US imperialism, all concealed behind textual attitudes of American exceptionalism (Loewen 2007, 31-69).

Textbooks also attempt to justify US imperialist policy when discussing President Woodrow Wilson's foreign policy in Latin America during the first half of the 20th century. An accurate portrayal of the interventions posed by the United States during his presidency does not typically show Wilson or the US in a positive light; yet, textbooks succeed in doing this by either omitting information or creating new information to support their patriotic propaganda. For instance, while half the textbooks Loewen surveyed did not even mention President Wilson's takeover of Haiti, *American Pageant* and *Challenge of Freedom* both invented a passage that claims Wilson was an anti-imperialist who was reluctant to militarily intervene, but felt he had to stabilize the country. In reality, Wilson was directly involved in the operation. He oversaw the dissolution of the Haitian legislature and the imposition of a less democratic constitution in order for the US to better exercise its hegemony in the region. Afterwards, the US ensured the establishment of large plantations, and US troops forced Haitian peasants in shackles to work on road construction crews. US Marines occupied Haiti until 1934, all while the Haitian natives suffered indiscriminate killing (Loewen 2007, 17). Likewise, every textbook Loewen surveyed also said that Wilson was firmly against the invasion of Mexico in 1914, even though it was his idea to begin with. Perhaps it would be helpful to note that Wilson was an outspoken white supremacist—although that too is omitted from the textbooks. Instead of debating and critically thinking about historical events from a

more global perspective, history is taught as a victory for the US, and a done deal. When students internalize history as facts to be quickly memorized and forgotten, they develop no understanding of relevant causality. For example, the United States' thirteen separate forays into Nicaragua are worth learning about if one wants to understand Nicaragua embracing a communist government in the 1980s (Loewen 2007, 29).

The United States' historical trend of interventionist foreign policy has been largely ignored by its textbook industry. Indeed, such interventions performed by the US would be considered nothing less than state-sponsored terrorism should the behavior ever be mimicked and reciprocated; yet this clear double standard cannot be realized by US citizens if they never learn about the actions of their own government. Another example of silenced history is the 1954 overthrow of the democratically elected leader of Guatemala, Jacobo Arbenz. Prior to his ousting, Arbenz antagonized the United Fruit Company, a large US corporation known to exploit Central and South American localities. He proposed land reform and planned to build a highway and a railroad, an endeavor that threatened to break United Fruit's trade monopoly. The US imposed a military dictator, and the result was forty years of a repressive junta that brutalized its indigenous majority, all while ensuring the survival of United Fruit's thriving monopoly and profit margins. Of the six most recently published history textbooks, four of them actually bother to mention this event. However, these four textbooks defend this policy by asserting anticommunism as the sole motive for the US government—not to promote America's most powerful corporate interests (Loewen 2007, 228).

As one might expect, textbooks rationalize other interventions with the same logic, if they mention them at all. For example, no textbook tells the story of how

President John F. Kennedy tried to kill Fidel Castro and destabilize Cuba with a vast covert program called Operation Mongoose (after the failed Bay of Pigs). Furthermore, the fact that the federal government tried to kill Castro twenty-four times by 1975 goes unnoticed by textbook writers (Loewen 2007, 230). Only three out of the eighteen major textbooks briefly mention America's role in the overthrow of democratically elected Chilean president, Salvador Allende; twelve of those textbooks leave out Chile altogether. The US went to great lengths to bring down Allende for his socialist reforms, including blocking international loans; subsidizing opposition newspapers, labor unions, and political parties; financing and fomenting an economically destabilizing truckers revolt; and of course training and funding the military that staged the bloody coup in 1973 in which Allende was killed. This history, like most stories of US imperialism, is deeply engrained in the minds of those whose lives were forever changed by the events. However, those few Americans who have read about this event in their textbooks are told that the sole purpose was to protect the world from the evils of communism. What's remarkable is that modern-day textbooks are still maintaining the irrational and paranoid McCarthyist rhetoric of the 1950s; the textbooks do not mention Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's explanation that the US would not and should not respect a country's electoral process or sovereignty if the results do not align with US interests (Loewen 2007, 231). This would conflict with the general theme of US textbooks, which is that everything the US does abroad is for democratic and humanitarian purposes simply because the US is inherently good.

One of the most deceptively damaging portrayals of American interventionist policy in the textbook industry is the depiction of the Vietnam War. Even today, this war

remains the most photographed and televised war in US history. Yet virtually none of the most famous pictures from the war are in textbooks—in fact not one textbook shows any damage done to Vietnam by the US. This is problematic not only because the realities of war are hidden, but also because these images had a hand in shaping history. Viewers around the world were able to understand the atrocities of the conflict and mobilize against it. The historical exclusion of such civic engagement makes the antiwar movement incomprehensible and denies students the empowerment of realizing their own potential as citizens in a democracy. Instead of boring students, the subject would make them feel more relevant to these historical happenings while allowing them to draw connections to the present; but most textbooks leave out the major highlights of the opposition. Martin Luther King, Jr. is known only for his activism against racism, which was just one point of what King referred to as the “triple evils”: racism, poverty, and militarism (The King Center, 2012). Understanding that these concepts were interconnected, he was the first major leader to come out against the war—a position he was loathed for, even by the black community. King was a radical whose legacy has been unfairly sanitized by the textbook industry. A veil of ignorance is being pulled over young Americans’ eyes, concealing the brave and powerful dissent against violent imperialism. Textbook authors seem to be attempting to inculcate the next generation into a blind allegiance to the United States, for US citizens cannot possibly challenge their government’s policies if they do not know them (Loewen 2007, 50-52).

The foreign policies pertinent to today’s post-9/11 American populace largely involve the region of the Middle East, specifically the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, no way exists for fully understanding these policies and their implications—

usually global anti-American sentiments—without knowing their history. Iranian history is an exception of textbooks speaking truth to causes of anti-Americanism. The 1953 CIA overthrow of Iranian democratically elected leader Mohammed Mossadegh and the imposition of a dictator, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlevi, is covered by all of the six new textbooks Loewen reviews in his latest edition. The overthrow was to dispose a leader who resisted Western petroleum companies' exploitation of Iran, and secure Iran's resources for the West. Unlike the other interventions, this one is not justified as necessary to the fight against communism. Instead, it allows students to understand why Iranians took over the American embassy in 1979, and its continuing hostility to American policies in the Middle East today (Loewen 2007, 227).

Unfortunately, most textbooks are not as candid when discussing American foreign policy in the rest of the Middle East. No textbook mentions America's long-time relations with Iraq's Saddam Hussein, a man the US helped to seize power in 1963 after overthrowing the previous leader, General Abdul Karim Qassem when he threatened US and British influence in the region. Since then, the US has aided Iraq in attacking Iran in the 1980s; provided materials for Iraq's nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons which Hussein used against the Iranians and his own people; blocked UN Security Council resolutions condemning Hussein's use of them; and then continued to send him weapons-grade anthrax, cyanide, and other chemical and biological weapons. Instead of supporting democracy, the US has actually supported repressive dictatorships in places like Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Uzbekistan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and many others. Most notably, the US helped to create al Qaeda and other Islamist extremist groups through its financial and military support in their battle against the Soviets in Afghanistan during the 1980s

(Loewen 2007, 269-272). This is all incredibly important information to provide to students if they are to understand why the attacks on 9/11 occurred, but only *American Pageant* explains why: resentment over the disastrous American-led sanctions on Iraq, the large US military presence in the Middle East (specifically the “holy land” of the Arabian Peninsula), and America’s support for Israel’s hostility toward Palestinian nationalism. This would make sense, given that al Qaeda targeted America’s most financially, militarily, and, if the attack had been completed as planned, politically symbolic capitols – the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the Capitol, respectively. But other than two explanatory sentences found in *Pageant*, today’s textbooks leave students without a clue, and therefore vulnerable to the deliberate misinterpretations spread by the Bush administration. At the time, the administration was putting itself in position to rally support for the War in Iraq. British intelligence later revealed the infamous 2002 Secret Downing Street Memo, “The intelligence and facts [on Iraq] were being fixed around the policy” (Rycroft 2002). The Bush administration framed its rhetoric around fear to explain the attacks and the ongoing threat to the US: “They hate our freedoms—our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other” (Bush 2001). Ironically, these freedoms are diminished when our students are uninformed—ultimately leading to the disenfranchisement of our youth. The way in which students learn history promotes apathy towards voting and activism as well as a lack of accurate information. Americans are left to believe that we are hated simply because we are good. According to the rest of history as presented by the US textbook industry, this could be plausible, for all the US ever did was done in the name of freedom and good will to others (Loewen 2007, 265).

This complete avoidance of analysis while presenting a nation without sin fuels an already robust sense of ethnocentrism. It leaves students unable or unwilling to learn from other cultures.

b. Consequences of American Exceptionalism in Education

The first consequence of the US education's propagation of American exceptionalism is that students become unable to think critically about the world around them. They are fed a narrative of America's unwavering glory and goodness and learn nothing of the contributions of other countries or the faults of their own. The second consequence is the introversion of American citizens away from participating in the global community, or their own local communities for that matter. History is traditionally taught from the perspective of the ruling elite, not the average citizenry. Real positive change is brought about when the people agitate for it, not because governments benevolently change on their own. However, this is not the story told by textbooks. Like the story of Martin Luther King, Jr. whose legacy has been sanitized to make him seem less radical, government leaders in American history have been discussed as heroes who happily enact positive changes such as civil rights or act as the world's humanitarians. In fact, history is told in neatly organized segments of presidential terms. No apparent causation exists, just elections and goodwill. Given this understanding of the political power structure, young Americans will probably have a low sense of community and collective efficacy in civil society, while also having a strong faith in the superiority of their nation.

Americans may feel no need to identify with the rest of the world. Rather, we are made to feel above it and to assume a sort of managerial position. Today the US spends more on its armed forces than the next fifteen largest spenders combined and has troops stationed in over 145 countries around the world (Heeley 2013). While many people in other countries have very different feelings about such a heavy US military presence, textbooks have used this presence as a symbol for American altruism, rather than hegemony (Loewen 2007, 222). Even George Kennan, head of Policy Planning Staff of State Dept 1948, wrote into US policy the need to exploit the rest of the world:

We have about 50% of the world's wealth but only 6.3% of its population. In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real test in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity. We need not deceive ourselves that we can afford today the luxury of altruism and world benefaction—unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of living standards, and democratization (Loewen 2007, 221).

These “unreal objectives,” however, are exactly the reasons given by American history textbooks to describe US foreign involvement. In other words, textbook authors are willfully engaging in manipulating students’ perceptions about their role in the world through hyper-patriotic propaganda.

This has completely skewed students’ understanding of their democracy and their position in the world. During the period between 1953 and 1977, for example, those in control of US foreign policy were all on the Rockefeller family payroll (Loewen 2007, 226). Given the Rockefellers’ interests in oil, their motives for such influence are evident. In situations of foreign activity, the US government has not proven representative of the people, at home or abroad. At the same time, Americans stand to gain, in the short term, by exploiting others for their resources. A society based on consumerism might find little

incentive to confront the establishment that enables them to consume so cheaply, especially if successful confrontation requires changing their lifestyle to accommodate global interests rather than their own immediate interests. In short, Americans need to vote, mobilize, and reclaim their designated power in decision-making processes, but are too individualistic and consumerist to notice or care.

Rick Shenkman, editor and founder of the History News Network and associate professor of history at George Mason University, has expressed similar views on American society. For example, he notes that the US has had mandatory education for over a century, so why is there such a lack of education about and understanding of the world? The record of our history as presented by textbooks suggests that when given the choice between a harsh truth and a comforting myth, Americans choose myth (Shenkman 2008, 3). Furthermore, there is also a lack of interest in understanding history, which I attribute to the feeling of disempowerment by such top-down, unfair accounts. Even regarding their own civic history, Americans are incredibly uninformed. Only one in four Americans can name more than one freedom listed in the First Amendment, while just one in one thousand can name all five (Shenkman 2008, 13-14). Only two in five Americans can name all three branches of US government (Shenkman 2008, 20), and 34 percent of Americans know that it is Congress that has the power to declare war. Not only do they not understand such constitutional powers, but a majority of Americans cannot even name their own member in Congress or their own senators (Shenkman 2008, 24). Even intelligent middle class Americans are profoundly ignorant of their history: in 2007, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute found that on average, college students answered 55 percent of questions correctly on a test that measured knowledge of basic

American civics (Shenkman 2008, 21). How is it possible to feel that one's country is the greatest country in the world without understanding its most fundamental qualities? But what is most striking is Americans' complete obliviousness to the rest of the world and to their country's role in it. For example, a majority of Americans do not know their own country is the only one to have used nuclear weapons in war (Shenkman 2008, 20). In 2007 (the fifth year of the Iraq War), only 21 percent could name the secretary of defense, Robert Gates. The Program on International Policy Attitudes⁴ oversaw a national poll carried out by Knowledge Networks⁵, which concluded that only fourteen percent of Americans could correctly answer the questions on foreign affairs, and only ten percent could answer the questions on geography (Shenkman 2008, 24). In a test administered by the US Department of Education called the National Assessment of Education Progress, or "the nation's report card" (Dillon 2011), among high school seniors who had just completed their history requirements, three-quarters were unable to identify the effect of United States' foreign policy on other nations. Appropriately, the Strategic Task Force on Education Abroad concluded in 2003 that America's ignorance of the outside world is so great that it constitutes a threat to US national security (Shenkman 2008, 25). So while Americans may not have great concern for the rest of the world, paying closer attention it would be rational, if only for reasons of self-interest.

The war in Iraq is perhaps the greatest recent example of American intellectual disengagement. The way students memorize their textbooks' bolded terms is the same way many American citizens learned the "War on Terror." Key phrases—like the "War

⁴ Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) is a joint program of the Center for International and Security Studies at the University of Maryland (CISSM) and the Center on Policy Attitudes (COPA)

⁵ A market research firm based in Menlo Park, California

on Terror”—were accepted as sufficient explanations for starting a war in Iraq: “It’s better to fight them there than here” (Suarez 2007); “You are either with us or with the terrorists” (Bush Sept. 20, 2001); “They hate us because we love freedom” (Bush Oct. 2002); “Axis of evil” (Bush Jan. 2002); “Evil-doers” (Bush Sept. 16 2001); and others. These slogans replaced any meaningful attempt at thinking critically about this war. Instead, there was a simplistic either-or dimension to this struggle; there were the good guys and the bad guys, and the Americans were the good guys. But Shenkman notes that while Americans in general were unaware of the millions of people around the world who did not consider Americans to be the good guys, this was known by anyone who had paid attention over the previous thirty years. In 1981, Secretary of State Alexander Haig testified before the Senate, explaining that the number one problem facing the US was terrorism. Indeed, anti-American terrorism had existed before then and has been ongoing since, but Americans did not consider the causation to the attacks on 9/11, and instead embarked on worldwide, bloody vengeance. Simultaneously, the US undertook a humanitarian expedition to “spread democracy” in places where it perceived that people could not get it on their own (Shenkman 2008, 132).

A more logical thought process might have been to first understand the grievances that led to 9/11, and then think about what those in Iraq might have actually wanted rather than projecting American values onto a society as if they were universal. For example, the US assumed that Muslims around the world defined *freedom* the same way Americans do, and wanted the same system the US has. But according to a Gallup poll from 2005, thousands of Muslims interviewed in eight Muslim-majority countries did not believe that the adoption of Western values would be helpful. Regardless, as Shenkman

notes, the goal of democracy is historically no guarantee against terrorism anyway (Shenkman 2008, 134).

With respect to reasons for 9/11, our freedoms had nothing to do with it—despite the rhetoric coming out of the Bush administration. Stephen Kinzer, author of *All the Shah's Men* and *Overthrow* (both histories of US overthrows) observed: “No one in the world cares how much or how little freedom there is in the United States. What angers them is the way the United States uses its power to crush freedom in other parts of the world” (Shenkman 2008, 135). But as Loewen tells us, Americans do not learn this history, and the shallowness of their understanding of the Middle East and their country’s role in rearranging it was exploited by the Bush administration. For as long as the imperialism of the past and present goes unnoticed by unaware citizens, the imperialism of the future will be enabled. This will only continue to prevent Americans from integrating into the global community.

c. Prospects for Enabling Global Citizenship through Education

Global citizenship is the notion that all humans are joined as citizens of the earth in a way that supersedes monolithic national identities. It means having a true sense of cosmopolitanism, an ideology based on the conviction that all human ethnic groups belong to a single community based on a shared, loosely connected value system.⁶ These ideological ideals require critical thinking skills—the ability to consider differing viewpoints and apply new information to one’s existing understanding. Thus, it is

⁶ There are many different definitions of cosmopolitanism, as well as an existing debate on whether universalism, or applying universal values is possible or even morally sound. I subscribe to the belief that we should not adopt universal cultural norms and values, which would invariably project one belief system onto another, but rather respect and embrace one another’s differences, so long as those differences are not channeling violence and oppression onto others.

impossible for students to understand their role in the world without being able to think critically, or to imagine themselves in the positions of others. Unfortunately, most young Americans are not exposed to other worldviews and consequently feel no need to understand them. After graduating high school, Americans seem not to seek out information about their communities or the world. Only twenty percent of people between the ages of 18 and 34 read a daily paper, and only eleven percent look at news webpages regularly (Shenkman 2008, 26). Half a century of studies shows that those who do not take up the news habit in their twenties probably never will (Shenkman 2008, 27). This is partially the result of the detachment felt by students while learning about themselves and the world through an historical prism. According to textbook publishers, history is made whether ordinary citizens participate or not; the top of the power structure acts on their behalf, and that is how change is affected. US history textbooks champion individualism and corporate American's self-centered ideologies and solutions. The narrative in American history textbooks is disempowering and serves as an incomplete history of the people as a powerful collective. It does not teach global responsibility but instead American exceptionalism. As a result, students do not develop a sense of responsibility for relevancy to local and global communities. Instead students feel powerless and apathetic, since institutions and those in power create changes, not them.

But a feeling of connectedness to the world and surrounding society can be nurtured in spaces of education. Instead of being taught the values of capitalism and colonialism as natural, students can learn a new narrative. The feeling of national exceptionalism and civic inconsequentiality can be reversed with more thoughtful understandings of the world, not by perceiving different societies as the global "other,"

but as America's equals. If history is told from the perspective of the people instead of the elite, it gives a human face to global struggles, allowing for more empathy and ownership over what occurs. Social movements and different cultures must not be devalued. Although understanding America's historic role in the world is important for students, it is perhaps more essential to understand that nations have their own histories, narratives that are intricate and deserve recognition and respect.

In an investigative study in an academic journal *Education*, "The Impact of Revisionist History on Pre-Service and In-Service Teacher Worldviews," researchers found that students gained a significantly greater appreciation and understanding of the study of history when they were exposed to a revisionist model. Revisionist history, as opposed to classical history, is a method of explaining past events in a way that leaves students able to make their own judgments. Classical (or traditional) history is a more conservative account of the past whereby historical figures and events are more or less fixed and not up for debate. Revisionism, however, is not an attack on the classical interpretations of history, but rather a natural evolution of the elucidations of the past. It is a process that attempts to (1) bring history in accord with as broad an array of facts as possible, (2) discuss the past on the basis of new and multiple interpretations of existing evidence, and (3) consciously include a greater historical voice for the experiences of marginalized groups (Franklin and Austin 2011).

Revisionist history acknowledges and challenges the politics of collective memory. Naturally, this becomes problematic for political interests that are better served by mass-recollection. In his June 2003 speech defending his decision to invade Iraq in June 2003, President George W. Bush criticized the revisionist approach: "Now there are

some who would like to rewrite history—revisionist historians is what I like to call them.” This statement was made while suggesting that revisionist historians had tried to undermine the threat of Saddam Hussein, and therefore undermine Bush’s choice to invade Iraq (CNN 2003). Exactly three years later, his brother, Florida Governor Jeb Bush, signed into law a state educational provision that denied such critical analysis of the past: “American history shall be viewed as factual, not as constructed, shall be viewed as knowable, teachable and testable, and shall be defined as the creation of a new nation based largely on the universal principles stated in the Declaration of Independence” (Craig 2006). House Bill 7087 as signed by Jeb Bush legislated that social studies learning in Florida would be mediated through assimilationist historical content, didactic teaching, memorization, and high-stakes testing (Franklin and Austin 2011). This sentiment is not limited to the Bush family or the state of Florida. In 2012, the Republican Party of Texas’ education platform stated:

We oppose the teaching of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) (values clarification), critical thinking skills and similar programs that are simply a relabeling of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) (mastery learning) which focus on behavior modification and have the purpose of challenging the student’s fixed beliefs and undermining parental authority (Strauss 2012).

If students are denied the opportunity to learn and implement critical thinking skills, they will be disadvantaged in understanding how history applies to the present and future. Critical thinking, and thus revisionist history, requires the receptiveness of new evidence that might disconfirm one’s preconceived ideas. It was the late Howard Zinn, an academic historian and social activist, whose application of history directly challenged the Bush brothers and the Texas Republican Party. In a 2005 Guardian article, Zinn showed opposition to the US involvement in Iraq by looking to lessons from history:

Now we are the occupiers. True, we liberated Iraq from Saddam Hussein, but not from us. Just as in 1898 we liberated Cuba from Spain, but not from us. Spanish tyranny was overthrown, but the U.S. established a military base in Cuba, as we are doing in Iraq. U.S. corporations moved into Cuba, just as Bechtel and Halliburton and the oil corporations are moving into Iraq. The U.S. framed and imposed, with support from local accomplices, the constitution that would govern Cuba, just as it has drawn up, with help from local political groups, a constitution for Iraq. Not a liberation. An occupation (Zinn 2005).

Zinn is referenced in both Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me* and the *Education* study for having an integral influence on revisionist history. In his book *A People's History of the United States*, Zinn retells American history from the perspective of the people *en masse*, not the traditional perspective of the elite. He documents history from the arrival of Columbus to the 2003 Iraq War and gives a side that is often withheld in textbooks.

The combination of anti-analytical curricula and homogenized, mythologized textbooks is dangerous for the prospects of promoting global citizenship. Efforts to change the textbook industry, and therefore compel change in school curricula, have been ongoing for decades. One of the first post-imperial attempts to question the validity of high school textbooks was furthered by Frances Fitzgerald in 1979 with his book entitled *America Revised*. He established that (1) history books change over time to reflect the views of the power elite that produce them, (2) the goal of the public education establishment has always been to keep the children of the working class in their place, (3) textbook reformers are typically "ahistorical" to use history as a tool of social control, and (4) most history textbooks are committee-written with a design that offends as few people as possible—a result that produces boring, passionless, and meaningless education (Franklin and Austin 2011). Like Fitzgerald, Loewen is a revisionist who believes history textbooks are information-driven and typically devoid of real conflict and suspense,

leading students to believe that history is comprised of facts only to be learned and memorized. Loewen also highlights that students enter college less knowledgeable about history than any other academic subject, which he attributes to its status as the least liked and most forgotten subject in American curricula. High school students generally describe social studies as confusing and having little relationship to their future, if at all (Franklin and Austin 2011).

The purpose of incorporating revisionist history in American high school curricula is to engage students and provide a much-needed academic checks-and-balance system—not to replace the current tradition in its entirety. However, revisionists are often labeled as unpatriotic leftists who seek to undermine traditional American values and goals. When the accepted stories and anecdotes from history like Columbus’s “discovery” are challenged, it provokes a fear that the universality of the American heritage itself is being challenged (Franklin and Austin 2011). This threatens the national pride that keeps Americans blindly loyal to the state. However, this is exactly what is necessary to begin chipping away at the American exceptionalist attitudes that hinders us from identifying with a global society.

In the study outlined in “The Impact of Revisionist History on Pre-Service and In-Service Teacher Worldviews,” researchers used information from the first two chapters of Loewen’s *Lies My Teacher Told Me* to formulate its selection of survey items that had a high probability of not being covered in most traditional high school history programs. The report tested Loewen’s suggestions and the results confirmed Loewen’s theories—students showed a strong preference for revisionist history over traditional history. The respondents indicated that they believed there was more to historical events and

American heroes than they had learned in high school; were comfortable with the idea of classroom teachers introducing controversy into the curriculum; viewed Loewen's teachings as generally helpful toward gaining a better appreciation for the study of history; and felt it was important not to solely define history through the eyes of the dominant ruling group (Franklin and Austin 2011).

The challenge of implementing these findings into the US education system is that teachers often rely on the textbooks to cover test material. The prevalence of the textbook and testing industry in education inherently conflicts with teaching revisionist history, as both texts and tests assume history is a set of facts that exist within a binary structure; a student answers either rightly or wrongly. Although restructuring the education system and redistributing power to the teachers may be difficult, instructors do have ways of encouraging students to see historical connections and have constructive debates about them. In my interviews with Long Island teachers and student teachers, I found that educators have achieved this kind of inspiration among students in a way that is independent from the textbook, despite the imposed restrictions.

IV. Interviews

Below are excerpts from a series of interviews that I conducted and transcribed of past, present, and soon-to-be teachers. Some chose not to disclose their identity for their own privacy reasons, but their dialogue is their own. In this section I provide some short, specific comments after each interview excerpt, whereas the next section consists of my overarching comments binding together the insight I acquired from the different interviews. The purpose of these interviews is not only to investigate the teaching of American exceptionalism in the classroom via textbooks, but also to identify the structural limitations that teachers might be facing before the teaching process can even begin. This is not to say that students are not learning exceptionalism even in the absence of textbooks or systemic restraints, but that surely such internalization is advanced by superficial means and measurements of academic “success.”

- a. Donald Delseni, my grandfather, started teaching in 1962 at PS 227 From 1970-76 he was an assistant principal, and then from 1976-96 he served as principal at another school in the same district, PS 200 Brooklyn. I asked him to speak about the education system primarily as it has structurally functioned in New York City. However, his educational philosophy is unique to his location.

Kayla Rivara (KR): *Tell me about your experiences as a teacher and a principal, and then how you saw the district’s education system change after you retired.*

Delseni: As a science teacher, the New York City Board of Education [today known as the NYC Department of Education] used to have a very good division of curriculum and instruction, and they used to have a syllabus with suggested lesson plans. These suggestions would have a name, a motivation, questions, concepts, homework, etc. But teachers were free to deviate from that.... There was a lot of flexibility and room for the teacher to be creative. As a principal, I always believed that a principal's role was to achieve congruency between meeting the needs of the children and meeting the needs of the staff that worked in that school. When you achieve that congruency, I believe you have a high-performing school.

I find that many teachers and administrators today are very unhappy with the top-down format that the Boards of Education have. There's not as much room for creativity. There are many ways that children learn, and teachers should have the flexibility and creativity, and principals should have the managerial prerogative to select those learning modalities that children will learn best. [Curriculum writing] should be done by people who will have a sense of ownership of that curriculum from within that school.

KR: *Regarding the current top-down format of the education system, can you talk about some of the things that Mayor Bloomberg has done while holding office?*

Delseni: One of the things that the mayor has done is he has hired many business people to run the Department of Education. At one time there was a Yale University reorganizational specialist who was made the Deputy Chancellor for Curriculum and Instruction. This gentleman made \$175,000 a year and never taught a day in his life. So you have inexperienced people telling teachers and administrators what they have to do. Consequently, many of the things I've seen coming out of this does not make

pedagogical or instructional sense, and if you ask many of the teachers who have had experience before with this I think they would concur.

A very new teacher doesn't have a background or a basis of comparison, or what I would call institutional memory. Many of the Boards of Education do not want teachers to know about what went on before and to me that's important to know where the school is coming from, what's the school's history, ideology, and so fourth. I had lunch with some retired teachers recently and they told me that the principal threw out all the plaques and awards that the students and the school had won in the past. They don't want to hear any other way, which to me is very shortsighted. Just because someone taught ten years ago does not mean that all of his concepts and methodologies are no longer valid. So basically I think you're going to get a different perspective from older teachers than from very new teachers.

The Department also spends a tremendous amount of money on outside consultants. They spent \$17 million on having administrators from England evaluate schools here—but that's the role of the superintendent. They also have something called the Aussie Program, where they have hired many Australian teachers to come and teach reading. We have teachers in America, in New York City, who can teach reading. Why do we have to spend the money? Furthermore, schools are now hiring outside agencies to conduct faculty conferences. When I had my faculty conferences, I would write the conference notes. I didn't hire an outside agency to conduct my faculty conferences; I did it myself. And if we had a meeting we'd go to the superintendent's office and might have some Dunkin' Donuts and a coffee urn. Nowadays, if they have a meeting they hire the Marriott Marquis for \$18,000 because business people are used to doing things like this,

and because the money is there, they will spend it. And then you'll hear teachers will say, 'We don't have enough paper in the school' or 'We don't have enough money for books.' How can this be? When I was a principal, the budget of the Board of Education was \$10 billion. Now it's about \$24 billion. It has gone up almost a billion dollars a year ever since I left. Now I realize costs go up, but still there is no reason or excuse why a school does not have the basic instructional supplies.

Kids need to have these basic supplies. But nowadays, they drill for these reading tests. Kids are bored in school. How does that inculcate a love of learning? Education should have a sense of fun about it. If the teacher can teach fun and interesting lessons, the kids will learn what needs to be known on the test; they don't need to be drilled. But now they give tests so frequently during the year that it takes away from that creativity and fun. But these business-oriented people don't have the same concepts of education.

And also on these tests, it has been found that there has been a lot of impropriety whereby teachers feel so pressured that many teachers and administrators start to give kids answers. And nothing justifies cheating, but the pressure of being fired or being given a low rating because of a test means that many times teachers will do things like that. And the state has dumbed down the scoring key, so if a kid gets thirty-five percent of the questions right out of seventy-five, he passes the test. That shouldn't be a passing grade. Then, the Mayor and the Central Board will say, 'Look at the level of achievement and level of improvement in Regents scores now.' Well, yeah if you lower the standards, of course more kids are going to pass.

Comments: Delseni demonstrates how standardized testing and corporate bureaucratization of the education system have changed the educational environment for both teachers and students. With many decades of experience and perspective, he tracks the changes in attitudes from teachers who once enjoyed a sense of agency and trust in their profession, and now have to abide by standards and procedures that do not match their understanding of fostering academic growth. Delseni notes students could do just as well on tests if teachers could reincorporate the creative lessons he saw as a teacher and principal, thus effectively teaching *above* the test. However, teachers have been confined by limitations in resources and curriculum mandates that they cannot create the same educational space that once inculcated a love of learning in their students. Students resultantly become bored and disengaged with their learning experience primarily because their purpose in school has been reduced to performing on tests—not appreciating education as an intrinsic, character-building value. Delseni fears that without the institutional memory of how schools used to be, a new generation of educators will begin to accept the current system as normative.

b. Jane Swersey is a teacher of history at Shoreham-Wading River High School, and was my AP global studies teacher in the 10th grade. Given her twenty-seven years of teaching experience, I went back to my old high school to get her perspective on the role of textbooks in producing critically thinking global citizens.

KR: *From your experience teaching global studies in this district, are you mandated by the school district to use a particular textbook?*

Swersey: No. We choose the textbook and the board has to approve it.

KR: *Do you use the textbook to teach?*

Swersey: Sometimes. The textbook has a whole section on the Industrial Revolution and brings in the US, and I don't want the US in the curriculum; it's not supposed to be in the curriculum. There are sections in the chapter that I choose to ignore... so then students will then ask why are we skipping? Students think that if it's in the textbook then we have to cover it. But the global studies curriculum does not say that teachers have to cover the United States expansion into the western part of North America. So I ignore those sections because I don't want the Euro- or the American-centric, I want it to be in the global perspective. The next chapter is going to be on imperialism and I am not going to use the textbook at all. I put into the Xerox machine a whole big packet on imperialism for the unit and that's what I'm going to use. I did the same thing with 19th century nationalism in Europe.

KR: *Why is that? Is the textbook insufficient?*

Swersey: The textbook *is* insufficient—textbooks are *notoriously* insufficient. And the supplements the textbook companies include are sometimes horrible—the homework and guided readings are abysmal. So it takes a lot of time [to provide alternative material] but I do it.

KR: *Do you think it limits the students' abilities to think within a larger global perspective?*

Swersey: Absolutely. Absolutely. Absolutely. But I don't even think the textbook at this point is an entity. Students are not reading that textbook. If I give them homework from the workbook pages like a guided reading that goes with the textbook, students are just looking for highlighted blue words. They get no sense of any bias that might be in the textbook.

KR: *Is there a way to make learning history more fun and engaging? Could you do away with the textbook all together?*

Swersey: Yes, absolutely, of course you could, especially now that New York State is going toward that Common Core where it's supposed to be documents-based. So for example, tomorrow's lesson is on the famine in Ireland in the 19th century, and my objective of today's lesson was that the students would be able to explain the ancient hatred of the British towards the Irish and I thought that was a strong statement to make but I thought that's what students had to know, that there was real contempt for the Irish. And that's actually the contradiction of British exceptionalism and imperialism, but that's part of my point—to deconstruct that exceptionalism.

Me: *Do you see some students become more open-minded, more able to think critically from the beginning to the end of the school year or their high school career?*

Swersey: Since I teach 9th and 10th grade, I see 9th graders who leave as 10th graders as becoming much more thoughtful.... Students can be manipulated so easily. And students will ask me, "what you do you think?" and I never tell them what I think because I want them to figure it out for themselves. But the more Common Core we do, the more students are looking for biases and it's different within the different levels. Now that I have the Smart Board I use more pictures but the difference that technology can make is,

if I put an image up I'm really careful about the background borders that I put in and show to students. If I put a map up with one background border and then the next map is the same map but a different color, and it's drawing your eyes to different places, that's bias. That's always bias and I always say to them when I give them pictures, see if you can find *my* bias or what I did with it because every single lesson that I do on a Smart Board is not just pictures, it's all crafted just to get them thinking. I can put pictures of the Irish famine on there because I want them to *see* the atrocity, which they have a harder time finding in words. So if you give them all the pictures, and then give them the words, it's easier to find the bias. But my point is yes, you *do* see growth.

KR: *It seems there is a lot of extra work on your part to get students thinking more critically, and I know you have standardized tests like the New York State Regents Exam to worry about, so could you just follow this framework and teach to the test to save yourself the trouble?*

Swersey: Of course I could. And I could teach to the workbook and I could stand there and go 'blah blah blah,' but I just can't do it half way. If I'm getting bored, then lord knows what *they're* thinking. You can't just walk in and start talking about a topic, so it takes a lot of time and energy, and sometimes I say to myself I don't have to do it, and it's almost like I'm obsessive compulsive and I tell myself I have to. But yes it *is* a lot of work and sometimes I get really frustrated. But for me, I have to do it.

KR: *Do you think the bureaucracy of standardized testing, New York State Board of Regents and the mandates are constricting or limiting teachers' creativity or disincentivizing creativity?*

Swersey: I feel like I never have enough time, so it constricts me. I always feel like I don't do the topic justice. It's almost like at the end you say 'Okay they got the soundbites' and now you move on because you don't have a choice. And so I think it's constricting curiosity; it's an overload of information that's just being thrown at them, so kids are just saying 'Tell me what I have to know for the test.' But to me when it comes to history I think it's fascinating because there are so many different absurd or unjust things that happened. So I think it's limiting in that sense.

KR: *So students aren't even interested in being critical thinkers because they're so preoccupied with the test?*

Swersey: Yes, but I don't know if that's just the test. I think that goes across the board. I really think the technology influences kids. I use the example of my first car and how it broke down all the time, and when it broke down I had to figure out what to do. Because I didn't have a cell phone I had to know strategies, and I think students today don't need strategies because you just call someone or text someone. It's not just the matter of a car breaking down but of taking extra thoughts and sequencing them. But logical thought doesn't have to happen in their own lives, so it's harder to now teach [critical thinking] because more and more students are coming in without that skill. If I don't have to figure out how to do something, then I'm not going to be curious.

Comments: Swersey, with almost three decades of experience in the classroom, has encountered some of the same institutional pressure that Delseni observed. While her application of alternative materials has not been restricted as much by her curriculum, their use requires extra work for Swersey because they are not promoted or advanced by

the current educational leadership. Simultaneously, she must respond to the demands of time to cover all of the topics on the New York State Regents exam. This inhibits her ability to spend time on teaching students to analyze and think critically—especially when these skills are not necessary for completing the test⁷. Swersey is also aware of the generational divide between the students and her. Growing up in a culture of an instant gratification via technology, students do not necessarily have the skills or motivation for problem solving through sequencing and analysis. The implication of these limitations is that students are unequipped for applying history as a tool for actively understanding present.

- c. Below is an interview with a US history teacher and social studies' department chair at a Long Island school district. She wished not to be identified by name or district, so I have given her the description of "Anonymous."

KR: *Can you tell me about your experience as a teacher and the role of textbooks in your classroom?*

Anonymous: For the last fifteen years I've been teaching high school history. There were some budgetary cuts last year and so my job has changed this year dramatically. I now teach fewer classes and have to split my time between schools.... Last year for the first time in a long time I taught a Regents 11th grade class and I didn't use the textbook at all. I gave it out so that if any parents were concerned about their child not having a textbook

⁷ See Holtzman interview

then they could have it but I didn't assign on any day in 182 days for them to do work from the textbook because the kids don't like textbooks.

KR: *And what about the tests? Do you have to worry about the New York State Regents for example?*

Anonymous: Of course we worry about the New York State Regents but that's irrelevant to the textbook. If we're covering the material in terms of the scope and sequence of the course, then the textbook is totally irrelevant. And again, kids don't like to read them; they like to do things online they like to do things that are portable.... No one is using the textbook on an everyday basis.... So for me there is no correlation from being successful on the test and the textbook they use, I think they're successful by learning the content and practicing the skills that they need. The textbook doesn't matter.... In this district the teachers use the textbook more as a guide than as a curriculum.

KR: *Have you noticed students applying history to today? Do they ask questions about the world or do they feel confined to the material and just take it piece by piece?*

Anonymous: No I think that the teachers do make connections to what's going on today with a concerted effort. So in the construct of a lesson most teachers are going to start a lesson with a motivation or a hook, something to catch the students' attention, and some of the best ways to do that is with something current and then saying 'let's take a look at why that is, or when else in history have we seen that?' So do the kids do it on their own? Probably some, but the teachers make the concerted effort so that it *does* happen.... I [also] think the level of student that existed fifteen year ago versus the level of student that comes in now is totally different. I think that kids were more intrinsically motivated fifteen years ago than they are today.

Comments: The anonymous teacher, like Swersey, acknowledged that students do not need the textbook in order to score high on the state test—indeed, many students do not pay close attention to the textbook anyway. As an alternative, teachers take extra time and effort to create more innovative lessons that will inspire or interest their students. However, this teacher also sees a change in the generation of students she works with in that they are less intrinsically motivated than her students fifteen years ago. This corresponds to Swersey’s theory that students do not see much cause to be investigative due to their distraction and gratification with technology.

d. Dan Holtzman is a former high school social studies teacher who now works as a principal at Shoreham-Wading River High School on Long Island.

KR: *Could you explain to me how much control you or the teachers have over your own curriculum?*

Holtzman: Education is managed on a state-by-state basis, but most states adopt a Regents curriculum that’s outlined by their individual states and they have their own assessments. As far as New York State is concerned, the state prescribes a curriculum for you called ‘scope and sequence.’ Basically it tells you concepts, topics, and events that need to be covered and then some key elements within each time period that need to be covered. The assessment that the state creates is based on that scope and sequence, which measures if the school follows that curriculum and will essentially determine if the students learned. I don’t necessarily think that the Regents assessment is an assessment of

learning. You can think back to any history regents you took; it does not necessarily require you to analyze or draw conclusions.... It's not asking you to rack your brain about anything, it's a lot of rote memorization. The global history curriculum is a two-year course with one exam: 50 multiple choice and two essays. How can you take a course that starts in prehistory, runs all the way to current day, and make a fifty question multiple choice exam and assume that that's a valid assessment of student learning? You just can't. Ask any history teacher, they will tell you the exact same thing. We, on the other hand, as a school try to instill in our teachers a model that has them raise the bar.... If you teach to the test, students will perform their best at the level of the test. But if you teach *above* the test, then the test should seem trivial and very easy, and the results should be much better than if you taught *to* it. So can teachers teach outside the curriculum? Of course they can. *Will* they is the more operative question to ask. Too often they feel they are confined by time, by the sheer volume of curriculum that needs to be covered, feeling they need to give a test every, or every other Friday, and then spend a day on review and then spend a day to go over it.... In looking forward to the Common Core standards, which everyone has started to teach by and will ultimately be teaching by, has moved to that sort of thinking where things are more skill-based, it's not about the content.... Common Core is not changing what gets taught but *how* it gets taught. Kids today are walking out of high school forgetting everything because there was no type of enduring learning. So Common Core is making students think and is becoming much more skill-based in context, and then the assessments are going to be more skill based.... The movement here is to get students to think and be about to formulate an opinion and be able to articulate that opinion in some sort of manner that makes sense that can be spoken

about—that's an element that's missing. We teach because this is what we're told to teach, but what are we producing in the end has been the big question forever.

.... But there has to be connection between school and home. How are educational initiatives [going to work with] the epidemic of video games, of childhood obesity. When I was young, we got home and went outside and played with our friends, and we had to be home by dinner. Now it's not about being active anymore. And you can do your research and find it shows that with active people, their brains are healthier and fire faster, they're clearer thinkers, they have energy and drive—there's a connection with all that, and what can we do other than provide physical education for 40 minutes every other day? Where're the parents in closing up the laptops and unplugging the Xboxes? Where is the balance in all of it? There's more of a responsibility between what's taught in school and what a person knows when they graduate high school. We as a school can only do so much.

We are bound and gagged by the state education department, being told what we have to teach whether we like it or not. When the state tells me something is a 5 on the rubric but I think it's a 3, it almost becomes counter-intuitive. Why am I setting a higher standard for my students when the state is not even holding a higher standard?

KR: *Is there anything that we as communities or you as educators can do to challenge that quantification and standardization of education?*

Holtzman: We can't just, as a school, decide not to give standardized tests.... But every program our school provides goes outside the scope of the state curriculum—our anti-bullying program, the DWI program, the character education programs—they have nothing to do with the curriculum; there is no curriculum for that. It has all to do with

building character in the students.... So is there something we can do? Yes. Can you deviate too far from the state's history curriculum? No.... But is it possible to bring in higher order thinking skills? Yes. It's very possible and very plausible to do it in every single lesson. Make students think!

KR: *Just to clarify, do teachers have the authority to decide to incorporate this kind of learning in place of administering class tests? Or administer fewer tests to save that time and focus on critical thinking skills?*

Holtzman: Sure, there's no minimum number of grades or tests that a teacher has to give. But in the short term, the concern is from the parents wondering why their child has fewer grades, and how their teacher is supposed to evaluate them based on that.....

Where's the curiosity? Where's the passion? There's no curriculum for that. As a teacher, you have to show that excitement and interest for the topics you teach in order to get the students excited.... But something like 30 percent of teenagers suffer from depression at some point in their adolescence.... You have to think, how many students didn't eat breakfast this morning? How many students had a family issue last night? How many students didn't get enough sleep last night?.... So the job of a teacher goes beyond the scope of a curriculum and a 40-minute history class. You can be the best most passionate teacher in the world and come up with the most innovative lessons, and still that might never penetrate the outside factors that influence how a student will learn.... But we don't just look at the situation and say okay well these things happen and there's nothing we can do; that's not the case. The case becomes, this student is not going to learn, this student is not going to be comfortable sitting in my class learning about the Reconstruction Era until we've established what's wrong and how to address it and how

to get the student the assistance he might need. That's part of the job of a teacher, too. So a lot of it is curriculum, but when you've got all that in place, there's no cure for the societal or outside family factors that influence you.

Comments: Holtzman reaffirmed many of the themes discussed by Delseni, Swersey, and Anonymous. Teachers can work harder to teach above the test, but time is a limiting factor given the sheer amount of content that must be covered for the test. Students are also of a different generation from the teachers—a generation that is much more influenced by technology. However, Holtzman also discusses the role of the community in impacting the academic performance of students. Many of the problems that schools must address are not problems that are caused by the school. And yet, stricter policy reforms have focused on targeting schools for any shortcomings of students rather than confronting and aiding the communities that are at the root of such issues. Holtzman's observations are confirmed by decades of research on education reform.

e. Jerry (last name undisclosed) discusses his experiences as a second-year teacher on Long Island.⁸

KR: *Are you required or pressured to use a particular textbook or curriculum? Do you need to focus on standardized testing and is there a connection between that and textbook content? What is your evaluation of their effectiveness?*

⁸ This interview was received via email.

Jerry: I've found that it varies by district, and I can really only speak from experience. At one school I worked in, regulations were very tight. Lesson plans needed to be in at least 2 weeks early for review, and everything you did was subject to change from the supervisor. At my current school, things are much different. While there's a general guide, the teachers get a lot more freedom to reach their goals; there's definitely a lot of trust put in us by the administrators!

On one hand, that's nice. Having the freedom to do what you want can be refreshing and it makes for the better overall classroom experience. But sometimes that oversight is missed, especially when you're new. How much time do you spend on a topic? Is a lesson you made covering everything that's important? Sure, you could ask other teachers/administrators, but in an environment where you're given freedom, it's almost awkward to repeatedly double check. It hasn't proved problematic in my view, but the idea of having ultra-controlling admins and supervisors can have some use for new teachers, especially when you get chunked into a class halfway through.

As far as the textbooks go, from the suburban districts I've been in, we practically ignore the things. Most of them are pretty solid from what I've seen when they are new editions, but the older the students get (10th, 11th grade) the less effective they are. I think the ultra-reliance on textbooks isn't really something going on in the suburbs outside of a teacher making the choice, although they do serve as great "outlines" for lesson planning!

As far as the standardized tests go, again in the suburbs they aren't quite as important as, say, the city, and even less so at the high school level where I am. I am teaching some AP courses where the test is really what we teach to, but I think it's

different than what you're getting at, as a lot of what the AP tests on is actually pretty good for social studies: analysis, critical thinking, etc.

To touch on effectiveness, like I mentioned, they are less useful the higher up you go. But they really do seem more like outlines than anything else, so they really can't sustain themselves on their own. The AP textbook, on the other hand, is more of a mess in a different sense, with small font and walls of text that I, as a history major, find myself having trouble wading through.

KR: *Do you find the textbook and/or tests to have a Euro-American bias?*

Jerry: They most certainly do, although I think they try hard not to if that makes sense. Some of this is inevitable, as devoting as much time to every civilization as you do your own wouldn't leave enough time in the day to do anything else, so I guess I can understand it. Although they are moving more and more away from it, with textbooks having longer chapters on non-Western civ and tying them together more—explaining the Chinese and Islamic roots of Renaissance ideas, for example. But that still doesn't change the fact that the Pax Mongolia gets a paragraph while the Renaissance gets its own chapter.

But again, there really seems to be a push to move away from this. Last year's global AP test had only a few Euro-centric multiple choice questions, with the goal being to try to kick global teachers from teaching it like its Euro. But even then, you run into the problem when you hit a time-period after the 1700's where even if you try to not be Euro-centric, the Western civilizations start having such long reach that you can never really get away from it. Aside from that, I think teachers are getting more and more freedom to do what they want in this regard. I know a teacher who spent over a month on

Islam in her 9th grade global class, while I covered it in 2 days! So while I don't think we will ever be able to give every civilization the time it really deserves, we are moving the right way.

KR: *Do you find the students are bored with learning history? How do you get them excited about learning history and make them feel it's relevant? Do you believe that breaking down American myths—Christopher Columbus as a hero, or spreading 'democracy and freedom' around the world—makes students more able to think critically about their country's role in the world?*

Jerry: Some of them can be bored, but it's how they get taught. You do occasionally get the “why is this important?” question, especially the farther back in time you go, and if you're basically just lecturing to the students, it's hard to give a good answer. But more hands-on approaches, where the students analyze documents, motivations, etc. are more effective as not only are you teaching them the history, but you're also teaching them how to think! From my experience, switching them to a more active, involved learning style is the best way to get them interested. Of course, tying it into current events helps too, but sometimes even that's difficult as they don't exactly follow current events! Aside from that, I like to give them at least one little tidbit a day that I feel would make an interesting fact to tell their parents: “Hey mom! Did you know the white wedding dress comes from Queen Victoria attempting to advertise English lace?” or “Did you know the Ace became the highest card in the deck after the French revolution to show the peasants rising up above the king!?”

As for the last question, absolutely. I had students asking me what country I could move to if I couldn't stay in America, and I told them Denmark, but I'd do it even if I

could stay! The idea that, not only are we not the best in the world, but we are actually pretty far down the ladder is important for students to get early. It's important not to beat them over the head with "America sucks!" but if you think you're the best at something, it's very difficult to motivate you to work hard. But if they can realize just how far behind they are, it gives them something to work towards.

Even little things, like showing them the 1936 Olympic games where Jesse Owens embarrasses Hitler. Of course we all make fun of him for being a racist, but then Jesse Owens returns to Ohio and can't sit at the same lunch counter as a white bus driver. Or reminding them of the fact that women are still treated almost as unequally as they were generations ago. And the fact that our country was founded by rich, slave-holding merchants whose first act was to disenfranchise over half the country's population! I like explaining it to them through the prism of the times, but looking at just how backwards things were can help them think critically about today. Because if you think the country was founded on equality, and has always been free and equal and beautiful, what point is there in trying to change anything?

Comments: Like the previous New York educators, Jerry has found that the textbook is not necessary to teach students history. He has, however, felt more comfortable with oversight than the more experienced teachers with "institutional memory," but this does not seem to have compromised his teaching methods. Jerry's energy and enthusiasm in challenging American myths appear to have a positive effect on his students. While he notes that many of his students do not follow current events, which makes it difficult for him to draw connections between the past and present, Jerry has realized that by

challenging the students' preconceived notions about history and their present role in the world, he has given them something to work toward; if students think their country is historically flawless and therefore presently ideal, they will not have the curiosity or incentive to investigate the past or the present.

f. Zach Dane is a part of the social studies teacher education graduate program at Hofstra. He was the only student-teacher to respond to my survey. Below, he shares his expectations for becoming a teacher in the near future.⁹

KR: *Why did you decide to become a social studies teacher? What do you hope to communicate to your future students?*

Dane: I wanted to become a social studies teacher because I enjoy all parts of it and want to spread my enjoyment to my students. Further, in my experience, the social studies teacher has always been the "fun" teacher and I feel that I fit that personality much better than the stereotype of other types of teachers. I hope to relay the importance of the past to my students as those who forget it are doomed to repeat it.

KR: *Do you have any specific creative teaching strategies to get students interested in learning about social studies?*

Dane: My specific strategy is to make learning fun and get really into the content, no matter how dull you might think that it might be. I try to bring any characters to life so that the students may remember what they learn based upon any traits that I might present or in the way I present it. I think that in order to be an effective teacher, you need to be

⁹ This interview was received via email.

willing to compromise to what interests your students. If they do not care about what you are teaching, more than not, they will not pay any attention and make it even more difficult for you. However, if you relate the content to something that interests them, they would be more likely to pay attention.

KR: *Are you worried about standardized tests, teacher evaluations, having enough time in the classroom to get through the material, or have any other concerns?*

Dane: To be honest, I am a little concerned about the standardized testing aspects, evaluations, and having enough time. However, I know that if I am able to teach the way that I am best at, it shouldn't be an issue. My big concern is scheduling the year in order to be able to get through the content without any major issue. One-hundred-and-eighty days are a lot of time but broken down, with school events and other conflicts, it becomes significantly reduced.

Comments: Dane, whose current position grants him the least “institutional memory” of the interviewees, demonstrates the least criticality of the system, but still shows concern for the standardized expectations that will undoubtedly encumber his time in the classroom. He has chosen this career path precisely because he wants American students to understand the importance of their history as a way to understand the present and sensibly affect the future. Dane plans to achieve this by accommodating and entertaining student interests to focus their attention, doing more work than the system expects of him in order to foster student growth. This is the same approach taken by the other dedicated teachers interviewed.

V. Interview Analysis

My action-oriented research of engaging in teacher discourse has provided additional insight to my understanding of underlying problems in education, and helped redefine and reshape that understanding. I have found that teachers' discourses can be silenced and governed internally through the ritualized discussion of textbooks, and through accessibility of discourse given the limitations of academic resources available to students. Teachers can, however, overcome this by replacing textbooks with other materials, thus gaining discursive power when confronting the external control over speech. Teachers can address and deconstruct the exceptionalist mythologies and attitudes substantiated by Loewen and Shenkman—provided they have the time—through more intensive lesson planning. Regardless, the discursive power of educators is limited by the institutionalized system of education reform that lays blame exclusively on schools rather than including the needs of the communities that directly impact student progress. Teachers are also limited by the shortage of time and energy in the classroom due to standardized testing.

A startling observation from the teachers interviewed was how much the education system has shifted towards standardization, and that the newer the teacher, the fewer criticisms he or she had of the system. From Don DelSeni's experience, who predicted I would encounter this conclusion, the older teachers and administrators are becoming increasingly unhappy with the top-down format of the bureaucracy that is ultimately stifling creativity. The dogmatic approach taken by bureaucrats—specifically those from the business community with no prior teaching experience—has a negative impact on the interests and growth of the students. With the greater push of the US

education's power structure towards an influential elite came a focus on standardized testing and rigid assessment-based methods. Such practices put pressure on teachers and students to produce good scores, but not necessarily good citizens. If teachers are limited in the strategies they can use and the materials they can teach, many students will be disadvantaged. Students are unique and require different learning modalities to grow intellectually and creatively—they cannot be evaluated simply by testing, nor represented merely as numbers. And yet this has been the discourse coming from centers of power within the education system.

The result of this shift in normative education has been lower standards and bored students. As DelSeni explained, schools reduce the standards to achieve higher test scores because they are competing for funding. The students in this system, if taught only to the test and by the textbook, are presented with no incentive to think critically or apply themselves to what they learn. However, this is why many teachers, at least those still with enough flexibility, have worked harder to teach away from testing and textbooks. Jane Swersey and the anonymous participant, for example, both note that students are not even reading the textbook. Instead, they look up the bolded words and try to memorize what is needed for the test, as that is the professed goal by the current leaders in education. Students internalize that what they learn is definitive, binary, and disposable. This in and of itself becomes a bias. When students are learning about America's foreign policy history, they accept it as true and move on. Regarding this method of learning, Swersey says, "I think it's constricting curiosity; it's an overload of information that's just being thrown at them, so kids are just saying 'Tell me what I have to know for the test.'" It is not the norm to debate what is deemed either the right or wrong answer on the

test that evaluates their performance as a student. And yet, when students are memorizing terms like ‘Manifest Destiny,’ it becomes internalized that the US is inherently exceptional. Through standardization, students become individualistic without developing inimitable reflections.

Almost all of the educators interviewed conclude that one of their primary concerns is not having enough time. Much of this has to do with the focus on standardized testing. Swersey says that students sometimes only get “sound bites,” but she must move on because she has no choice. Dan Holtzman agrees that while teachers *can* teach above the curriculum, most teachers do not have the time to. He also added that standardized testing, particularly the New York State Regents assessments, does not push you to think critically or analyze. Rather, it is mostly rote memorization. Global studies teachers, as just one example, have only two years to teach about the world from prehistory all the way through the present-day. Then the way the state measures the students’ understanding of that history is with fifty multiple-choice questions and two essays. This is clearly not a valid assessment of students’ growth. But as Holtzman said, which reflects DelSeni’s observations, “We are bound and gagged by the state education department, being told what we have to teach whether we like it or not.”

Other problems identified by teachers include students’ home environments and also their generation’s relationship to technology. Most students are accustomed to instant gratification, using technology to get quick answers. As a result, students do not have the skills to take extra, sequenced thoughts because they do not have to in their daily lives. And without that need, according to Swersey, there is no curiosity to learn. Holtzman also draws a connection between student enthusiasm and technology. He

observes that students are spending more time sitting and watching television or playing video games than they are exercising or functioning within a healthy, structure-oriented lifestyle—something he recalls his generation doing. Holtzman asserts that parents and communities have a huge influence over a student's attitude toward education. If they are not given sufficient support at home, or the community does not value or have the resources to support the school, students are less likely to be engaged in the classroom or perform at higher levels: "We as a school can only do so much."

Although teachers cannot deviate too far from the state's history curriculum, educators *can* try to teach above it if time permits. One way of doing that is actually outside of the classroom and with the cooperation of the community. Holtzman explains that schools, provided they have access to enough resources, can set up character education programs that go beyond the scope and sequence of the state that teach good citizenship and proper behavior. Examples of this include anti-bullying programs, drug awareness and prevention campaigns, or volunteer clubs that operate within the community. Through these programs, students can draw connections between their community or other outside influences and their academic progress, which can help inspire more efficacy and community involvement. Essentially, students see the classroom material come to life by their very own hands.

While the role of a teacher extends far beyond the classroom, the position within the classroom becomes more difficult when trying to negotiate the resources and instructions imposed by the system. Swersey concluded that it is her job as a teacher to deconstruct biases and insinuations of exceptionalism. She does this by working to create more alternative methods to teach. For example, Swersey does not always use the

textbook, especially when she determines that it is insufficient. Instead, she uses pictures and unique supplements to present the material and get students to draw connections and think critically about what they are learning. The anonymous teacher frequently disregards the textbook entirely.

Jerry, while acknowledging that textbooks do have a Euro-American bias, conceded that the newer textbooks are slowly progressing away from it. In the interim, Jerry has found that more hands-on, active, and involved learning approaches, like having students analyze documents, is the best way to get them interested and is more effective than using the textbook anyway. “Not only are you teaching them the history, but you’re teaching them how to think!” Jerry notes that weaving current events into the learning of history in with current events is helpful, but that sometimes that is too difficult because students do not follow current events. Dane, the future teacher, has found during his training that creatively bringing historical figures to life is one way to get students to not only remember what they learn, but to also have fun learning it. He has affirmed that by relating the content to something that interests the students, they will be more likely to pay attention. Although Dane, like other teachers, worries about the time constraints resulting from standardized testing, he sees a need to inspire students to love learning history because those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it.

Several teachers could see their students growing towards being global citizens when they went above and beyond the textbook and testing. Jerry found that by breaking down American myths (like Columbus), students start thinking more critically about themselves and their role in the world. He observes that if students think they are the best at something (American exceptionalism), it becomes very difficult to motivate them to

work hard. But if they can realize just how far behind the US is, it gives the students something to work towards: “If you think the country was founded on equality, and has always been free and equal and beautiful, what point is there in trying to change anything?”

VI. Concluding Remarks

The standardization of education has impeded students' abilities to think critically and individually. Instead of inculcating students with a love of learning and global understanding, standardized testing and the mainstream textbook industry have become a medium for communicating undeniable values of American exceptionalism and self-interested individualism. The implication of a multiple-choice test is a simplified understanding of history—a concrete phenomenon painted black and white. But raw history does not appear in the form of right or wrong answers. It must constantly be reevaluated and reapplied to our understanding of the present day. This method, however, does not lend itself easily to quantifiable measurements of student growth, which in turn makes the educational elite uncomfortable and the associated industries less profitable. This is why we have seen a consistent shift toward more and more centralization and standardization of the education system, which in turn marginalizes those at its core: students and educational professionals.

History (as presented by textbook and testing industries) has been exploited and warped to present a largely mythological, disconnected, and monolithic identity of the United States, which manifests in the way we see the rest of the world. Students are not curious to learn that which has been given to them as indisputable facts of their own country's greatness; there is no reason to investigate something that has already been achieved by their political leadership, much less a relatable citizenry, especially when the means of learning it is in the form of regurgitation. The tragic result is a generation of apathetic voters who have no connection to global citizenship or any real form of empowered collectivism. Instead, Americans turn inward and are often seduced by

frightening propaganda. Without the tools to critically think and create cognitive linkages from past to present contexts, we will remain submissive to manipulation and exploitation. It is in this condition that we build walls without windows and drop bombs without reserve. It is then when we permit the propagation of violence and capitulation around the world, when we engage in uninformed antagonism that we resign ourselves to anger, fear, and disempowerment. The struggle for peace and justice is deeply rooted in the struggle for our nation's education. It is in our children that we find innocence, empathy, and the curiosity to learn more about the world around them. They are not born with fear in their hearts. Rather, that fear is learned, and hardened by standardization. Reversing this means the aberration of current educational norms, for the individuality of our children cannot be standardized.

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