

THE LANGUAGE  
POLICE



*How Pressure Groups Restrict  
What Students Learn*

Diane Ravitch



ALFRED A. KNOPF NEW YORK 2003

officials impose it, but publishers censor their products in order to secure government contracts. So the result is the same.

Censors on the right aim to restore an idealized vision of the past, an Arcadia of happy family life, in which the family was intact, comprising a father, a mother, and two or more children, and went to church every Sunday. Father was in charge, and Mother took care of the children. Father worked; Mother shopped and prepared the meals. Everyone sat around the dinner table at night. It was a happy, untroubled setting into which social problems seldom intruded. Pressure groups on the right believe that what children read in school should present this vision of the past to children and that showing it might make it so. They believe strongly in the power of the word, and they believe that children will model their behavior on whatever they read. If they read stories about disobedient children, they will be disobedient; if they read stories that conflict with their parents' religious values, they might abandon their religion. Critics on the right urge that whatever children read should model appropriate moral behavior.

Censors from the left believe in an idealized vision of the future, a utopia in which egalitarianism prevails in all social relations. In this vision, there is no dominant group, no dominant father, no dominant race, and no dominant gender. In this world, youth is not an advantage, and disability is not a disadvantage. There is no hierarchy of better or worse; all nations and all cultures are of equal accomplishment and value. All individuals and groups share equally in the roles, rewards, and activities of society. In this world to be, everyone has high self-esteem, eats healthful foods, exercises, and enjoys being different. Pressure groups on the left feel as strongly about the power of the word as those on the right. They expect that children will be shaped by what they read and will model their behavior on what they read. They want children to read only descriptions of the world as they think it should be in order to help bring this new world into being.

For censors on both the right and the left, reading is a means of role modeling and behavior modification. Neither wants children and adolescents to encounter books, textbooks, or videos that challenge their vision of what was or what might be, or that depict a reality contrary to that vision.

## FIVE

### *Censorship from the Right*

And shall we just carelessly allow children to hear any casual tales which may be devised by casual persons, and to receive into their minds ideas for the most part the very opposite of those which we should wish them to have when they are grown up?

—Plato, *The Republic*, Book II

THE WORD *censorship* refers to the deliberate removal of language, ideas, and books from the classroom or library because they are deemed offensive or controversial. The definition gets fuzzier, however, when making a distinction between censorship and selection. Selection is not censorship. Teachers have a responsibility to choose readings for their students, based on their professional judgment of what students are likely to understand and what they need to learn. Librarians, however, unlike teachers, are bound by a professional code that requires them to exclude no publication because of its content or point of view. It is also important to remember that people have a First Amendment right to complain about textbooks and library books that they don't like.

Censorship occurs when school officials or publishers (acting in anticipation of the legal requirements of certain states) delete words, ideas, and topics from textbooks and tests for no reason other than their fear of controversy. Censorship may take place before publication, as it does when publishers utilize guidelines that mandate the exclusion of certain language and topics, and it may happen after publication, as when parents and community members pressure school officials to remove certain books from school libraries or classrooms. Some people believe that censorship occurs only when government

As a student in the Houston public schools, I had firsthand experience with the political pressures exerted by extreme right-wing forces. When I was a senior at San Jacinto High School in 1955-56, I worked one class period each day in the library. One day I discovered a pile of books stashed under the main circulation desk, all of which were about Russia and the Soviet Union. When I tried to replace them on the shelves, the librarian stopped me and said that they had been removed from circulation. My curiosity piqued, as soon as I had free time, I went straight for the banned books under the counter and read them. Anything that is forbidden is almost by definition attractive to adolescents who want to know what the big deal is. I learned a lot about Russia, more than anyone else in my school, since no one else had access to any books about it. The only book I still remember is Walter Duranty's *I Write As I Please*; I didn't know it at the time, but Duranty was very controversial. As the *New York Times*'s correspondent in Moscow in the 1930s, he consistently rationalized and covered up Stalin's terror tactics. Historians and biographers now recognize that he failed to report Stalin's most egregious crimes.<sup>1</sup> His book would probably have been way over the heads of most students at San Jacinto High School, and if they were told to read it, they would not have been interested anyway. But it seemed to me that suppressing it made it more alluring. Because I read it clandestinely, I knew nothing about its context. It would have been better to read it critically and discuss it, along with other books about Russian and Soviet history; as it was, all that we heard in our classes was crude anticommunist propaganda.

While I was in junior high school and high school, a right-wing group called the Minute Women of the USA wreaked havoc on the school system with a campaign of intimidation and name-calling. The Minute Women were a potent political force in school politics in those years; they waged letter-writing campaigns, heckled speakers, harassed political opponents, and ran candidates for public office. For several years, they actually dominated the school board and used their control to toss out textbooks and humiliate teachers and administrators whose views offended them. I don't think it is an overstatement to say that the Minute Women unleashed a reign of terror during their brief ascendancy.

Minute Women appeared unannounced in classrooms to monitor what teachers were saying. A survey by the National Education Association found that 37 percent of the city's teachers thought there was a

spy system in the schools, and 60 percent had personally experienced "unwarranted pressures" by outsiders. Teachers knew that they were being watched, that their every word was noted; the fear among them was palpable. School board members pored over textbooks in search of words, phrases, and ideas that were "socialistic" and "communist."<sup>2</sup>

The great battle for the soul of the Houston schools began in 1951, when the local chapter of the Minute Women was organized. About two hundred men and women formed the organization, which determined to combat what they perceived as creeping socialism in the public schools. The Minute Women devoted themselves to fighting communism, socialism, socialized medicine, and racial integration, as well as any textbooks that appeared to further these causes. They were fiercely opposed to the New Deal and to any expansion of the federal government, which they believed was synonymous with socialism; socialism, in their eyes, was a stage on the way to Soviet-style communism. Houston was a politically conservative city, and the chapter grew rapidly. In November 1952, the Minute Women succeeded in electing some of its members to the city's school board.

In 1951, I was a seventh-grade student at Albert Sidney Johnston Junior High School. What I learned in school was at odds with what I learned at home. My parents were yellow-dog Democrats (a yellow-dog Democrat, it was said, would vote for a yellow dog before he would vote for a Republican). At the dinner table, my parents told me that Franklin Delano Roosevelt was a great president, but at school I heard that FDR's New Deal was the beginning of creeping socialism. My parents loved Harry S. Truman, but at school I was informed that he had undermined the military by firing General Douglas MacArthur. The general, we learned in school, was a heroic personification of American individualism. In the spring of 1951, all the loudspeakers in our junior high school broadcast MacArthur's "farewell speech" to a joint session of Congress ("Old soldiers never die, they just fade away," he said), and we students were expected to listen. Knowing how my parents felt and being somewhat rebellious by nature, I defiantly read a book while the general spoke, and I was given a "U" conduct rating for the semester because of my insubordination. And this was before the Minute Women got organized.

In 1952, the school system announced an essay contest on the subject of the United Nations. Apparently some administrator had made a terrible mistake, because the topic was hastily withdrawn (the

subject, said an assistant superintendent, was "too controversial") and replaced by a new topic, "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty," a slogan that happened to be the credo of the Minute Women.

In junior high school, our classes were regularly assembled in the auditorium to hear anticommunist speakers or watch propaganda movies about the dangers of socialism and communism (the words were used interchangeably). One especially frightening film depicted life under socialism, in which a bewildered American family confronted a totalitarian state. A sepulchral voice told the family where to live and commanded the father to work at a job not of his choosing. Again and again the Godlike voice boomed out at the terrified family, telling them what to do. These stridently anticommunist films replaced the movies that taught racial and religious tolerance, like Frank Sinatra's *The House I Live In*, which I had seen as a seventh grader. That was the kind of "socialist" thinking that the Minute Women had organized to fight.

The school board scrutinized textbooks, especially those that dealt with political issues, and rejected anything that offended the right-wing majority. The leading textbook critic on the board was Mrs. Earl Maughmer, who objected strenuously to any positive mention of the United Nations or any "one world" philosophy. (She was always referred to as Mrs. Earl Maughmer; her own first name was never mentioned in newspaper articles.) Led by Mrs. Maughmer, the Houston school board rejected geography and economics textbooks that had already been approved by the state of Texas; Mrs. Maughmer said that they contained "UN propaganda" and advocated federal control of public services. The school system dropped a proposed high school geography course because the board had barred the textbooks needed to teach the course. In a cartoon in the *Houston Post*, a comic character said, "Texas is bounded on the north by the Red River," and another character replied, "There goes *that* geography book."<sup>3</sup>

I had two history instructors who represented opposite political extremes. My eleventh-grade American history teacher, Anastasia Doyle, believed that Senator Joseph McCarthy was the greatest living American. My ninth-grade world history teacher, Nelda Davis, stood up to the right-wing zealots who ran the school board and achieved heroic status in the eyes of many fellow teachers. Not long after I was a student in her class, Davis became the school district's supervisor of

social studies. She was appointed during a two-year period when the right-wingers were briefly out of power. When Davis applied for funding to attend the annual meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies in Cleveland, the school board rejected her request. Mrs. Frank Dyer, a leader of the right-wing bloc, warned that there were two speakers at the Cleveland meeting who were associated with "communist-front groups." Mrs. Dyer said that she would not allow any school employee to go to any meeting at public expense unless she had personally reviewed the list of speakers and the content of their speeches. Colleagues of Davis, members of the public, and even the so-called liberal group on the school board contributed the necessary funds, and Davis, a thirty-year veteran of the Houston schools, went to the meeting despite the board majority's wrath.

Davis then ran afoul of the board again when it rejected geography and economics textbooks that a panel of teachers recommended. Davis was in charge of social sciences, and Mrs. Maughmer blamed her when the selection committee kept recommending the rejected books. Mrs. Maughmer charged that Davis had a conflict of interest in the textbook battle because she was under contract to write a world geography textbook for Macmillan, which had published one of the rejected books.

My former world history teacher was in the front-page headlines day after day as a target of Mrs. Maughmer and the other extremists on the board. She wasn't confrontational, but she didn't back down. Actually the school board made itself a laughingstock, because of the majority's wacky ideas and bullying tactics.

Davis stuck it out as supervisor of social studies until 1958, when she resigned to take an administrative position in Prince George's County in Maryland. About the same time, Macmillan and the Houston school board reached an agreement about the company's disputed geography textbook. Macmillan agreed to delete any words and sentences that were offensive to Mrs. Maughmer. The revised book no longer contained suggestions that the nations of the world needed to find common solutions to common problems and that the United Nations might help to secure international peace.

The publisher's surrender to the censors on the Houston school board was the high point of the right-wingers' reign. As McCarthyism waned in the rest of the country, it also waned in Houston. After years

of contention, the school board changed hands, and the Minute Women never again controlled the schools. Over the next decade, black Houstonians were elected to the board, the schools were desegregated, and the right-wingers' irrational fears of subversion, the federal government, and the United Nations became historical curiosities rather than live causes. It was a source of joy to me that the Houston Independent School District, half a century later, won national recognition for its school reforms under the leadership of an African American superintendent, Rod Paige, who became U.S. secretary of education.

Battles over the political orientation of textbooks are nothing new in American educational history. Over the years, publishers have revised their textbooks or written new ones in response to political protest. For more than half a century after the Civil War, textbook publishers could not sell the same school histories in both the North and the South. When southern states demanded textbooks that presented the Confederacy sympathetically, and northern states insisted on textbooks that taught children about the southerners' treason, compliant publishers produced northern and southern editions of their histories. In the late nineteenth century, southern states initiated statewide textbook adoptions to make sure that no "partisan" (i.e., anti-Confederate) schoolbooks got into their children's hands. After World War I, during a period of superpatriotic fervor and xenophobia, American history textbooks were criticized by patriotic societies and ethnic organizations. The Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion complained that "un-American" textbooks failed to instill a love of country. Ethnic organizations representing Irish Americans, German Americans, Jewish Americans, and African Americans demanded inclusion of their heroes in the textbooks. The Hearst newspapers launched a textbook investigation, as did elected officials in various cities and states. The most outspoken textbook critic was "Big Bill" Thompson, the mayor of Chicago, who accused the leading American history textbooks of being "pro-British," a charge that resonated with his Irish and German supporters. The textbooks' allegedly slavish devotion to all things British, he claimed, undermined children's respect for our Founding Fathers and their achievements. One of the targets was David Saville Muzzeley's history of America, the most widely

used high school textbook in the nation. Three state legislatures passed bills banning the adoption of any textbook that slighted the founders of the Republic or the preservers of the Union. Textbook authors and publishers responded to the critics by deleting allegedly pro-British passages and judgments from their books (such as the observation that some colonists did not want to separate from Britain) and increasing their patriotic references.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, textbooks were attacked by other groups, such as antievolutionists, extremist xenophobes (like the Ku Klux Klan), the Daughters of the American Revolution, organized labor, the public utilities industry, and the Women's Christian Temperance Union. If the outcry was loud enough, the textbook publishers did some more trimming and revising. Some deleted any reference to evolution from their biology textbooks, in response to the agitation against Darwinism and the well-publicized trial of teacher John Scopes in Tennessee. Some strived to present organized labor in a favorable light, in cooperation with the American Federation of Labor's textbook review. At the same time, the public utility industry invested in a campaign to persuade publishers to remove material that it did not like and to write new interpretations that showed it in a favorable light.

In the late 1930s, with the political atmosphere overheated by omens of war in Europe and Asia, superpatriotic groups became concerned about radicalism in the schools and universities. The DAR and the American Legion were worried; so too was the Hearst press, which wrote scare stories about the influence of leftist professors on campus. Anticommunist crusaders issued lists that "named names" of individuals and organizations that had "knowingly or unknowingly" contributed to the growth of communist sentiment in the United States; these lists were used in many communities by right-wing textbook critics, who scrutinized references and bibliographies in textbooks to determine whether the books were relying on "subversive," "communist front" sources. A score of state legislatures enacted loyalty oaths for public school teachers. In 1938, the House of Representatives approved funding for its Un-American Activities Committee to investigate subversive activities by both fascists and communists. A number of states set up investigating committees to look for subversion in their public schools and colleges.

The series that caught the brunt of this wave of antiradicalism was Harold Rugg's social science textbooks. Rugg was a professor at

Teachers College, Columbia University, who had developed his series over many years while working at the experimental Lincoln School. His textbooks were read by millions of students in some five thousand schools across the country. Rugg was a leftist reformer who was part of a Teachers College group of professors who called themselves "frontier thinkers" and saw themselves as advocates of a new age of collectivism. In 1940, articles in two journals—*Nation's Business* and the *American Legion* magazine—accused Rugg of fomenting treason in his textbooks. Both articles were lurid exaggerations, but they found a ready audience. The Rugg books were burned in Ohio and banned in many other districts. Within a few years, the sales of the Rugg textbooks had fallen to a trickle.<sup>5</sup>

After World War II, as Cold War tensions grew, so too did the hunt for subversives and subversive textbooks in the schools. A variety of Red-hunting groups took up the cause, including the Minute Women, the Sons of the American Revolution, and various ad hoc organizations (such as the Guardians of American Education). As in the 1930s, they circulated names of writers and public figures whom they believed were communists or communist sympathizers, and the censors cited the appearance of these names in textbooks as evidence of a subversive political slant. If it gave too much attention to civil rights issues (or in some cases, any attention at all), a textbook might be branded as "pro-Red," especially in the South. In 1949, a new quarterly publication called *Educational Reviewer*, written by Lucille Cardin Crain, began to criticize textbooks for subversive leanings. One of her targets was a widely adopted high school civics book, Frank Magruder's *American Government*. Radio commentators and newspapers repeated her charges, and the book was dropped by some school districts. After the publisher agreed to revisions and deletions, the controversy subsided and the book was once again widely adopted. In 1958, E. Merrill Root's *Brainwashing in the High Schools* charged that eleven American history textbooks paralleled the Communist Party line; a year later the DAR published its own list of 170 subversive textbooks. These lists fueled many state and local textbook censorship battles. The well-worn themes were revived in the 1960s by the John Birch Society, which warned that communist-inspired ideologues were promoting sex education and promiscuity in the schools.

The anticommunist campaign against subversive textbooks was replaced in the 1980s by an equally impassioned crusade against im-

moral books and textbooks. Right-wing groups shifted their focus from the communist threat to religious and moral issues. Groups such as the Reverend Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum, the Reverend Donald Wildmon's American Family Association, Dr. James Dobson's Focus on the Family, the Reverend Pat Robertson's National Legal Foundation, and Beverly LaHaye's Concerned Women for America, along with Mel and Norma Gabler's Educational Research Analysts in Texas, pressured local school districts and state boards of education to remove books that they considered objectionable. The New Right attacked textbooks for teaching secular humanism, which they defined as a New-Age religion that ignored biblical teachings and shunned moral absolutes. If it was right to exclude the Christian religion from the public schools, they argued, then secular humanism should be excluded too. If it was acceptable to teach secular humanism, they said, then Christian teaching should have equal time. The textbooks, said the critics, failed to distinguish between right and wrong, and thus taught the "situation ethics" of "secular humanism." They disapproved of portrayals of abortion, out-of-wedlock pregnancy, homosexuality, suicide, drug use, foul language, or other behavior that conflicted with their religious values. The right-wing critics also opposed stories that showed dissension within the family; such stories, they believed, would teach children to be disobedient and would damage families. They also insisted that textbooks must be patriotic and teach a positive view of the nation and its history.

Textbook publishers were in an impossible situation. On the one hand, they were pressed on all sides to be studiously neutral by removing every point of view and every potential controversy from their books; on the other, fundamentalist parents complained that the textbooks' neutrality was a failure to take a stand on behalf of correct morality. The harder the textbook editors tried to make their products inclusive of all points of view without endorsing any, the more impossible it was to satisfy both the Christian New Right and those who did not share its fundamentalist theology.

The teaching of evolution was extensively litigated in the 1980s. The scientific community weighed in strongly on the side of evolution as the only scientifically grounded theory for teaching about biological origins. Fundamentalist Christians, however, insisted that public schools should give equal time to teaching the biblical version of crea-

tion. Several southern legislatures passed laws requiring "balanced treatment" of evolution and creationism, but such laws were consistently found to be unconstitutional by federal courts, which held that evolution is science, and creationism is religion. In 1987, the United States Supreme Court ruled 7-2 against Louisiana's "balanced treatment" law. Yet fundamentalist insistence on "creation science" or "intelligent design" continued unabated. When states debated the adoption of science textbooks or science standards, critics demanded that competing theories should get equal time. In 2000, Republican primary voters in Kansas defeated two state school board members who had voted to remove evolution from the state's science standards.

The religious right mounted numerous challenges to textbooks in the 1980s. The most important was the case of *Moertz v. Hawkins County Board of Education* in Tennessee. In 1983, fundamentalist Christian parents in Hawkins County objected to the elementary school textbooks that were required reading in their schools. The readers were published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston (now owned by Harcourt). The parents complained that the textbooks promoted secular humanism, satanism, witchcraft, fantasy, magic, the occult, disobedience, dishonesty, feminism, evolution, telepathy, one-world government, and New Age religion. They also asserted that some of the stories in the readers belittled the government, the military, free enterprise, and Christianity. At first the parents wanted the textbooks removed from the local public schools. Eventually, however, they sought only that their own children be allowed to read alternate books that did not demean their religious views.

The parents received legal support from the Concerned Women for America. The school board was backed by the liberal People for the American Way. The battle turned into an epic left-right political showdown: one side claimed that the case was about censorship, and the other side argued that it was about freedom of religion.

For five years the case garnered national headlines as it wound its way up and down the federal court system. In 1987, the parents lost in federal appeals court, and in 1988, the United States Supreme Court decided not to review the appellate court decision. The judges decided that "mere exposure" to ideas different from those of the parents' religious faith did not violate the First Amendment's guarantee of free exercise of religion.

Defenders of the Holt Basic Readers celebrated their legal victory, but it was a hollow one. In a comprehensive account of the case, Stephen Bates noted that the Holt readers were "once the most popular reading series in the nation," but were brought to "the verge of extinction" by the controversy associated with the court case.<sup>6</sup> If publishers learned a lesson from the saga of the Holt reading series, it was the importance of avoiding controversy by censoring themselves in advance and including nothing that might attract bad publicity or litigation. The 1986 revision of the series, designed to replace the 1983 edition that was on trial in Tennessee, omitted some of the passages that fundamentalist parents objected to. The Holt readers won the legal battle but were commercially ruined. This was not a price that any textbook publisher would willingly pay.

A third major area for litigation in the 1980s involved efforts to ban books, both those that were assigned in class and those that were available in the school library. The first major test came not in the South but in the Island Trees Union Free School District in New York. There the local board directed school officials to remove ten books from their libraries because of their profanity and explicit sexual content, including Bernard Malamud's *The Fixer*, Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*. The courts traditionally deferred to school officials when it came to curriculum and other policy making, but in this instance the students who objected to the school officials' decision won by a narrow one-vote margin. In 1982, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the students had a "right to receive information." The decision was far from conclusive, however, as the justices wrote seven opinions, none of which had majority support.

Many book-banning incidents were never challenged in the courts. In the 1970s and 1980s, school officials in different sections of the country removed certain books from school libraries or from classroom use, including J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, George Orwell's *1984*, MacKinley Kantor's *Andersonville*, and Gordon Parks's *Learning Tree*. In most cases, parents criticized the books' treatment of profanity, sex, religion, race, or violence.

The battle of the books shifted to Florida in the late 1980s. In Columbia County, a parent (who was a fundamentalist minister) com-

- The Good Earth* by Pearl Buck  
*The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck  
*A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich* by Alice Childress  
*If Beale Street Could Talk* by James Baldwin  
*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou  
*Johnny Got His Gun* by Dalton Trumbo  
*The Learning Tree* by Gordon Parks  
*Lord of the Flies* by William Golding  
*Love Story* by Erich Segal  
*Manchild in the Promised Land* by Claude Brown  
*My Darling, My Hamburger* by Paul Zindel  
 1984 by George Orwell  
*Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck  
*One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* by Alexander Solzhenitsyn  
*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey  
*Ordinary People* by Judith Guest  
*Our Bodies, Ourselves* by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective  
*The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne  
*A Separate Peace* by John Knowles  
*Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut  
*To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee<sup>7</sup>

By 2000, the American Library Association's list of the "most attacked" books had changed considerably. Most of the classics had fallen away. At the beginning of the new millennium, the most challenged books were of the Harry Potter series, assailed because of their references to the occult, satanism, violence, and religion, as well as Potter's dysfunctional family. Most of the other works that drew fire were written specifically for adolescents. Some of these books were taught in classes; others were available in libraries.<sup>8</sup>

The most heated controversy over textbooks in the early 1990s involved a K-6 reading series called Impressions, which was published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston. The Impressions series consisted of grade-by-grade anthologies with a cumulative total of more than eight hundred reading selections from authors such as C. S. Lewis, Lewis Carroll, the Brothers Grimm, Rudyard Kipling, Martin Luther King Jr., and Laura Ingalls Wilder. Its purpose was to replace the

plained to the local school board about a state-approved textbook used in an elective course for high school students. The parent objected to the book because it included Chaucer's "The Miller's Tale" and Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. The school board banned the book, and its decision was upheld in federal district court and in an appellate court. In Bay County, a parent complained about Robert Cormier's *I Am the Cheese*, a work of adolescent fiction that contains some mild profanity and not especially explicit sexual scenes. The school superintendent suppressed not only that book but required teachers to write a rationale for every book they intended to assign unless it was on the state-approved list. The superintendent then proscribed a long list of literary classics that he deemed controversial, including several of Shakespeare's plays, Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby*, and Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*. Parents, teachers, and students sued the local school board and the superintendent to prevent the book-banning, and a federal district judge ruled that it was acceptable to remove books because of vulgar language but not because of disagreement with the ideas in them. The litigation soon became moot, however, when the superintendent retired, and all of the books were restored in that particular district.

During the 1980s and 1990s, and after, there were numerous challenges to books by parents and organized groups. Many were directed against adolescent fiction, as authors of this genre became increasingly explicit about sexuality and more likely to utilize language and imagery that some adults considered inappropriate for children. The thirty "most frequently attacked" books from 1965 to the early 1980s included some that offended adults from different ends of the political spectrum. Some were assigned in class; others were in the school library. The list included:

- The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain  
*The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank  
*Black Like Me* by John Howard Griffin  
*Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley  
*The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger  
*Deliverance* by James Dickey  
*The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* by Tom Wolfe  
*A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway  
*Go Ask Alice* by Anonymous



old-fashioned "Dick and Jane"-style reader with literary anthologies of high interest for children.

The texts may have been altogether too interesting, because they captured the avid attention of conservative family groups across the country. Before they became infamous among right-wing groups, the books were purchased by more than 1,500 elementary schools in thirty-four states. A small proportion of the series' literary selections, some of them drawn from classic fairy tales, described magic, fantasy, goblins, monsters, and witches.

Right-wing Christian groups, including Focus on the Family, Citizens for Excellence in Education, and the Traditional Values Coalition, organized against the Impressions series. The controversy became especially fierce in the early 1990s in California. The state-approved textbooks came under fire in half of California's school districts. Large numbers of parents turned out for school board meetings to demand the removal of the readers, which they claimed were terrifying their children. One district glued together some pages in the books to satisfy critics. Some districts dropped the series. Critics objected to stories about death, violence, and the supernatural. They charged that the series was promoting a New Age religion of paganism, the occult, and witchcraft. In one district, angry parents initiated a recall campaign against two local school board members who supported the books (the board members narrowly survived the recall vote). In another district, an evangelical Christian family filed a lawsuit charging that the district—by using the Impressions textbooks—violated the Constitution by promoting a religion of "neo-paganism," which relied on magic, trances, a veneration for nature and animal life, and a belief in the supernatural. In 1994, a federal appeals court ruled that the textbook series did not violate the Constitution.

Public ridicule helped to quell some of the ardor of those who wanted to censor books. Editorial writers across California uniformly opposed efforts to remove the Impressions series from the public schools, providing important encouragement for public officials who were defending the books. The editorial writers read the books and saw that they contained good literature. Most reckoned that children do not live in a hermetically sealed environment. Children, they recognized, see plenty of conflict and violence on television and in real life as well. They confront, sooner or later, the reality of death and loss.

Most know the experience of losing a family member, a pet, a friend. Over the generations, fairy tales have served as a vehicle for children to deal with difficult situations and emotions. Even the Bible, the most revered of sacred documents in Western culture, is replete with stories of violence, betrayal, family dissension, and despicable behavior.

One cannot blame parents for wanting to protect their children's innocence from the excesses of popular culture. However, book censorship far exceeds reasonableness; usually, censors seek not just freedom from someone else's views, but the power to impose their views on others. Parents whose religious beliefs cause them to shun fantasy, magic, fairy tales, and ghost stories will have obvious difficulties adjusting to parts of the literature curriculum in public schools today. They would have had equal difficulty adjusting to the literary anthologies in American public schools one hundred years ago, which customarily included myths and legends, stories about disobedient children, even tales of magical transformation. It may be impossible for a fundamentalist Christian (or Orthodox Jew or fundamentalist Muslim) to feel comfortable in a public institution that is committed to tolerance and respect among all creeds and promotion of none. This conflict cannot be avoided. Much of what is most imaginative in our culture draws upon themes that will prove objectionable to fundamentalist parents of every religion. Schools may offer alternative readings to children of fundamentalist parents, but they cannot provide readings of a sectarian nature, nor should the schools censor or ban books at the insistence of any religious or political group.

Even though the religious right has consistently lost court battles, its criticisms have not been wasted on educational publishers. The Impressions series, for all its literary excellence, was not republished, and quietly vanished.

Fear of the pressures that sank the Impressions series has made publishers gun-shy about any stories that might anger fundamentalists. Textbook publishers are understandably wary about doing anything that would unleash hostile charges and countercharges and cause a public blowup over their product.

Publishers of educational materials do not want controversy (general publishers, of course, love controversy because it sells books in a competitive marketplace). Even if a publisher wins in court, its books

are stigmatized as "controversial." Even if a textbook is adopted by a district or state over protests, it will lose in other districts that want to avoid similar battles. It is a far, far better thing to have no protests at all. Publishers know that a full-fledged attack, like the one waged against Impressions, means death to their product. And the best recipe for survival in a marketplace dominated by the political decisions of a handful of state boards is to delete whatever might offend anyone.

## *Censorship from the Left*

Any writer who follows anyone else's guidelines ought to be in advertising.

—Nat Hentoff

THE PRESSURE groups of left and right have important points of convergence. Both right-wingers and left-wingers demand that publishers shield children from words and ideas that contain what they deem the "wrong" models for living. Both assume that by limiting what children read, they can change society to reflect their worldview.

Neither side, however, acknowledges that its efforts at censorship are doomed to fail since schools compete for children's attention with far more powerful media. Does it really matter if a child never reads a textbook story with strong males or disobedient children, never encounters the word *mankind* or images of the occult, if that same child also watches television or sees movies where such images prevail?

The left-wing groups that have been most active in campaigns to change textbooks are militantly feminist and militantly liberal. These groups hope to bring about an equitable society by purging certain language and images from textbooks.

Lee Burress, a leader of anticensorship activities for many years in the National Council of Teachers of English, describes in *The Battle of the Books* how feminists and liberals became censors as they sought to "raise consciousness" and to eliminate "offensive" stories and books. Joan Delfattore, in *What Johnny Shouldn't Read*, writes that political correctness, taken to its extreme, "denotes a form of intellectual terror-

ism in which people who express ideas that are offensive to any group other than white males of European heritage may be punished, *regardless of the accuracy or relevance of what they say*" (italics in the original). The censors from the left and right, she says, compel writers, editors, and public officials to suppress honest questions and to alter facts "solely to shape opinion." Once a society begins limiting freedom of expression to some points of view, then "all that remains is a trial of strength" to see whose sensibilities will prevail.<sup>1</sup>

While the censors on the right have concentrated most of their ire on general books, the censors on the left have been most successful in criticizing textbooks. Although left-wing censors have occasionally targeted books too, they have achieved their greatest influence by shaping the bias guidelines of the educational publishing industry. Educational publishers have willingly acquiesced even to the most far-fetched demands for language censorship, so long as the campaign's stated goal is "fairness." Only a George Orwell could fully appreciate how honorable words like *fairness* and *diversity* have been deployed to impose censorship and uniformity on everyday language.

Since the 1950s, the leading target of left-wing censors has been Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. This book has unsettled people ever since it was published in 1885. The only thing that has changed over the years has been various groups' reasons for banning it. As soon as it was published, libraries began excluding it because of Twain's use of dialect and Huck Finn's rude behavior. Since the 1950s, black civil rights activists have sought to remove it from the classroom because of its repeated use of the word *nigger* and Twain's portrayal of the runaway slave Jim. The New York City Board of Education dropped the book in 1957 because it was "racially offensive." In 1982, in one of the ironic moments in the history of censorship, the principal of the Mark Twain Intermediate School in Fairfax County, Virginia, attempted to remove the book, calling it "racist trash." Black parents have complained about the book in many different school districts across the nation, trying to get it banned. Sometimes they succeeded, sometimes they didn't, but in every case their complaint was the same: The book's language is insensitive and offensive.

There are many reasons not to censor *Huckleberry Finn*. The book's centrality in American literature is chief among them; Ernest Hemingway famously wrote in *The Green Hills of Africa* that "all modern literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*."

Twain was not racist; on the contrary, he was one of the most powerful voices of his age against racism and social injustice. Teachers and students alike must learn to grapple with this novel, which they cannot do unless they read it.

Twain's use of the word *nigger* will ensure that *Huckleberry Finn* remains controversial long into the future. Some publishers have replaced the word with substitutes, like *slave* or *servant* or *hand*. The literary critic Lionel Trilling insisted that the book should be read as Twain wrote it, including that word: "This is the only word for a Negro that a boy like Huck would know in his place and time—that is, an ignorant boy in the South before the Civil War."<sup>2</sup> Even if offensive words were blotted from our language, he wrote, "the fact that they were once freely used ought not be suppressed. For it is a fact that forms part of our national history, and a national history is not made up of pleasant and creditable things only. And it is a part of the consciousness of themselves of each of the ethnic groups who have had to endure one or another degree of social disadvantage; it is something to be confronted and dealt with, not evaded or forgotten."

Perhaps the best single treatment of the controversy surrounding the book is Jocelyn Chadwick-Joshua's *The Jim Dilemma: Reading Race in Huckleberry Finn*.<sup>3</sup> The slave Jim, she points out, is a man of great dignity, integrity, and humanity in a world of scoundrels and hypocrites; as a black man (and as an escaped slave), he knows when to wear a mask and when to disguise his voice. Chadwick-Joshua, an African American scholar, has defended the book to local school boards and argued for its importance in understanding our nation's history and literature. *The Jim Dilemma* explains why black and white students should read *Huckleberry Finn* without bowdlerization.

The organization that led the left-wing censorship campaign was the Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC). Founded in 1966 in New York City, CIBC was active over the next quarter-century as the best-known critic of racism and sexism in children's books and textbooks. Directing its critiques not as much to the general public as to the publishing industry and educators, CIBC issued publications and conducted seminars for librarians and teachers to raise their consciousness about racism and sexism.

CIBC ceased its organizational life in 1990; its most enduring

legacy proved to be its guidelines, which explained how to identify racism, sexism, and ageism, as well as a variety of other -isms. They were the original template for the detailed bias guidelines that are now pervasive in the education publishing industry and that ban specific words, phrases, roles, activities, and images in textbooks and on tests. The CIBC guidelines are still cited; they circulate on many Web sites, and they continue to serve as training materials for bias and sensitivity reviewers.<sup>4</sup>

CIBC's initial goal was to encourage publishers to include more realistic stories and more accurate historical treatments about blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and women. It awarded annual prizes for the best new children's books by minority writers. However, soon after it was founded in the mid-1960s, the political and cultural climate changed dramatically. In the wake of riots and civil disorders in major American cities, including New York, the racial integration movement was swept away by movements for racial separatism and black power. CIBC was caught up in the radicalism of the times. Its goals shifted from inclusion to racial assertiveness, from the pursuit of racial harmony to angry rhetoric about colonialism and the "educational slaughter" of minority children. As its militancy grew, CIBC insisted that only those who were themselves members of a minority group were qualified to write about their own group's experience. It demanded that publishers subsidize minority-owned bookstores, printers, and publishers. It urged teachers and librarians to watch for and exclude those books that violated its bias guidelines.

CIBC's critiques of racial and gender stereotyping undoubtedly raised the consciousness of textbook publishers about the white-only world of their products and prompted necessary revisions. However, in the early 1970s, CIBC demanded elimination of books that it deemed "anti-human," racist, and sexist. Insisting that children's books "mold minds," CIBC urged librarians to take action against racist and sexist books. To help librarians and teachers identify books that were racist and sexist, CIBC evaluated current titles. Its representatives lobbied the American Library Association to change its policies on intellectual freedom and to encourage librarians to exclude "biased" books. CIBC spokesmen argued that the First Amendment rights of textbook writers and publishers were superseded by the Fourteenth Amendment rights of students to be protected from books that "inflicted injury that required remedial action." Arguing that current educational materials

were so biased that they harmed students who were not white males, CIBC urged the federal government to regulate the publishing and communications industries.<sup>5</sup>

Under pressure from CIBC, the American Library Association debated whether librarians should take a stand against reprehensible expression. In 1973, the ALA passed a resolution called "Sexism, Racism, and Other -isms in Library Materials," which reaffirmed the organization's opposition to any efforts to remove, restrict, or attach stigmatizing labels to books that were "allegedly derogatory to specific minorities or which supposedly perpetuate stereotypes and false images of minorities." The statement ended with a ringing affirmation that "intellectual freedom, in its purest sense, promotes no causes, furthers no movements, and favors no viewpoints. It only provides for free access to all ideas through which any and all sides of causes and movements may be expressed, discussed, and argued. The librarian cannot let his own preferences limit his degree of tolerance, for freedom is indivisible. Toleration is meaningless without toleration for the detestable."<sup>6</sup>

This eloquent statement did not end the debate, however. CIBC pressed on, demanding that the ALA abandon its neutrality and firmly oppose racism and sexism in library collections. In 1979, CIBC won a surprise victory at the annual meeting of the ALA. Although it was not scheduled to participate in the conference, it lobbied for a resolution against racism and sexism and in favor of sensitivity training for librarians and library users. During a two-and-a-half-hour debate on the conference floor, some librarians expressed fears of censorship but the resolution swept through to approval. CIBC scoffed at those who worried about censorship and hailed the resolution as a far-reaching plan to combat racism and sexism in American libraries.<sup>7</sup>

The ALA did initiate workshops to raise consciousness about racism and sexism, but over the next few years it maneuvered back into its traditional defense of intellectual freedom. In 1982, it rescinded its earlier policy on "Sexism, Racism, and Other -isms" and replaced it with a policy called "Diversity in Collection Development." This statement decried censorship and said that "removing or not selecting materials because they are considered by some as racist or sexist" was an example of censorship. It also affirmed the librarians' responsibility to give all library users equal protection in their "liberty to read, view, or listen to materials and resources protected by the First Amend-

ment, no matter what the viewpoint of the author, creator, or selector." It dropped the rather elegant argument that intellectual freedom "promotes no causes, furthers no movements, and favors no viewpoints," but reiterated that "intellectual freedom, the essence of equitable library services, provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a question, cause, or movement may be explored."<sup>8</sup>

Even as it was battling to persuade the nation's librarians that they must label or isolate racist and sexist texts, CIBC attacked numerous literary classics as racist, including Hugh Lofting's *Dr. Dolittle* books, Pamela Travers's *Mary Poppins*, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Theodore Taylor's *The Cay*, Ezra Jack Keats's books (*Snowy Day* and *Whistle for Willie*), Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and William H. Armstrong's *Sounder*.<sup>9</sup> The American publisher of Dr. Dolittle, agreeing that the series contained stereotypical images of Africans, expurgated the books to remove offensive illustrations and text. The original version of the books has now disappeared from library shelves and bookstores.

CIBC attacked fairy tales as sexist, asserting that they promote "stereotypes, distortions, and anti-humanism." It charged that such traditional tales as "Little Red Riding Hood," "Cinderella," "Jack and the Beanstalk," "Snow-White," "Beauty and the Beast," "The Princess and the Pea," "Rumpelstiltskin," and "Hansel and Gretel" were irredeemably sexist because they portrayed females as "princesses or poor girls on their way to becoming princesses, fairy godmothers or good fairies, wicked and evil witches, jealous and spiteful sisters, proud, vain and hateful stepmothers, or shrewish wives." The "good" females were depicted as beautiful, the "bad" ones as evil witches. The males were powerful and courageous, while the females were assigned to "traditional" roles as helpers. Typically, the characters in fairy tales rose from poverty to great wealth, CIBC complained, but no one ever asked about "the socioeconomic causes of their condition"; no one ever talked about the need for "collective action" to overcome injustice. In the eyes of CIBC, fairy tales were not only rife with sexist stereotypes, but with materialism, elitism, ethnocentrism, and racism too.<sup>10</sup>

CIBC's *Human (and Anti-Human) Values in Children's Books* listed 235 children's books published in 1975. Each was evaluated against a checklist that measured whether it was racist, sexist, elitist, materialist, ageist, conformist, escapist, or individualist; or whether it was

opposed to those values or indifferent to them; whether it "builds a positive image of females/minorities" or "builds a negative image of females/minorities"; whether it "inspires action vs. oppression"; and whether it is "culturally authentic." Only members of a specific group reviewed books about their own group: Blacks reviewed books about blacks, Chicanos reviewed books about Chicanos, and so on. Few of the books reviewed had any lasting significance, and few of them are still in print a quarter-century later. One that is still read is John D. Fitzgerald's *The Great Brain Does It Again*, which CIBC rated as racist, sexist, materialist, individualist, conformist, and escapist.

The author Nat Hentoff reacted angrily to what he called CIBC's "righteous vigilanteism." Although he agreed with the council's egalitarian goals, he warned that its bias checklists and its demands for political correctness would stifle free expression. He interviewed other writers who complained about the CIBC checklist but were fearful of being identified. CIBC's efforts to eliminate offensive books and to rate books for their political content, he argued, were creating a climate in which "creative imagination, the writer's and the child's, must hide to survive." Its drive against "individualism," he said, was antithetical to literature and the literary imagination: "Collectivism is for politics," he said, not for writers.<sup>11</sup>

In retrospect, CIBC appears to have had minimal impact on general books. Despite having been denounced as racist, *The Cay* and *Sounder* remain commercially successful. Fairy tales continue to enchant children (although they are seldom found in textbooks and are usually bowdlerized). The public was only dimly aware, if at all, of CIBC's lists of stereotypes, its reviews, and its ratings. Publishers kept printing and selling children's books that defied CIBC's strictures.

Where CIBC did make a difference, however, was with publishers of K-12 textbooks. Textbook houses could not risk ignoring CIBC or its labeling system. No publisher could afford to enter a statewide adoption process with a textbook whose contents had been branded racist or ageist or handicapped or biased against any other group. The publishers' fear of stigma gave CIBC enormous leverage. When publishers began writing their own bias guidelines in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they consulted with CIBC or hired members of its editorial advisory board to counsel them about identifying bias. James Banks, a member of the CIBC advisory board, wrote the bias guidelines for McGraw-Hill; his wife, Cherry A. McGee Banks, was

one of the main writers of the Scott Foresman-Addison Wesley guidelines.

CIBC multiplied its effectiveness when it worked in tandem with the National Organization for Women (NOW), which was also founded in 1966. Unlike CIBC, which operated from New York City, NOW had chapters in every state. CIBC and NOW frequently collaborated to fight sexism and to promote language censorship in the publishing industry and in textbooks. Feminist groups, some associated with NOW, others operating independently, testified at state hearings against unacceptable textbooks, pressured state and local school boards to exclude such books, and lobbied publishers to expunge sexist language from their books. Feminists demanded a 50-50 ratio of girls and boys, women and men, in every book. They counted illustrations to see how many female characters were represented. They noted whether girls and women were in passive or active roles as compared to boys and men. They made lists of the occupations represented, insisted that women have equal representation in professional roles, and objected if illustrations showed women as housewives, baking cookies, or sewing. They hectorred publishers, textbook committees, and school boards with their complaints. And they made a difference.

In 1972, a group called Women on Words and Images published a pamphlet titled *Dick and Jane as Victims: Sex Stereotyping in Children's Readers*, which documented the imbalanced representation of boys and girls in reading textbooks. In the most widely used readers of the mid-1960s, boys were more likely to be lead characters and to play an active role as compared to girls, who were portrayed as dependent, passive, and interested only in shopping and dressing up. At textbook hearings around the country, feminist groups brandished the book and demanded changes. Within a year of the pamphlet's appearance, the authors reported that they had drawn national attention to the problem. Publishers consulted with them for advice about how to revise their materials.<sup>12</sup> By the mid-1970s, every major publishing company had adopted guidelines that banned sexist language and stereotypes from their textbooks.

By adopting bias guidelines, the publishers agreed to police their products and perform the censorship demanded by the politically correct left and the religious right. Publishers found it easier to exclude anything that offended anybody, be they feminists, religious groups, racial and ethnic groups, the disabled, or the elderly, rather than to get

into a public controversy and see their product stigmatized. It was not all that difficult to delete a story or a paragraph or a test item, and most of the time no one noticed anyway.

The publishers reacted differently to pressure groups from the left and right. Companies did not share the Christian fundamentalist values of right-wing groups; they sometimes fought them in court, as Holt did when its elementary readers were challenged in Tennessee in the mid-1980s. By contrast, editors at the big publishing companies often agreed quietly with the feminists and civil rights groups that attacked their textbooks; by and large, the editors and the left-wing critics came from the same cosmopolitan worlds and held similar political views. The publishers and editors did not mind if anyone thought them unsympathetic to the religious right, but they did not want to be considered racist by their friends, family, and professional peers. Nor did they oppose feminist demands for textbook changes, which had the tacit or open support of their own female editors. In retrospect, this dynamic helps to explain why the major publishing companies swiftly accepted the sweeping linguistic claims of feminist critics and willingly yielded to a code of censorship.

Publishing companies zealously protect the confidentiality of their internal discussions. However, in the mid-1980s, when fundamentalist parents in Hawkins County, Tennessee, sued Holt, Rinehart and Winston in *Mozert v. Hawkins County Board of Education*, 2,261 pages of correspondence among editors and executives at the company were subpoenaed and entered into the court records. Stephen Bates, the author of *Battleground*, a study of that controversy, first reported on the content of these documents, and he made them available to me for this book. These files reveal in clear detail the political warfare waged against Holt's reading series by partisans of both right and left, as well as the private exchanges among editors about how to react to the latest salvo from a left-wing or right-wing group.

The Holt reading series reached the market in 1973, just as the great wave of feminist criticism broke over the publishing industry, and it was in trouble with feminists from the beginning. The Holt Basic Readers contained a good deal of excellent literature, but by today's standards, the 1973 edition was undeniably sexist: Women and girls played subordinate roles, while men and boys were frequently shown in active and dominant occupations. The first-grade book declared that dolls and dresses were for girls, and that trains and planes were for

boys. Stories and illustrations contained more male characters than female characters. All of this material had passed through the hands of female authors, female editors, and female text designers, with no one noticing the disparate treatment of boys and girls. But as feminist criticism intensified, Holt, Rinehart and Winston issued its guidelines on "the treatment of sex roles and minorities" in 1975, and revised its popular readers in 1977 to expand the representation of females and minorities in the text and art and to eliminate any sexist language.

As soon as the Holt series was published, the complaints began to pour in from conservative parents as well. The Indianapolis school board said that it would not adopt the series unless certain words, phrases, paragraphs, and stories that offended conservative parents were deleted. These parents objected to stories that included the word *hate* or that seemed to condone lying or bad behavior or anger or family disunity; they positively despised a story called "How to Keep the Cousin You Hate from Spending the Whole Weekend at Your House and Maybe Even Longer" because it used the word *hate* and showed two boys sharing the same bed, which might foster "homosexuality."<sup>13</sup>

No sooner had the editors begun changing offensive words, cutting paragraphs, eliminating problematic stories, and pasting in new material in response to conservative complaints than the feminist tide rose up and crashed over them. In 1973, feminists in California attacked every reading textbook considered for statewide adoption, including the Holt Basic Reading series. NOW lodged a formal complaint with the state's curriculum commission, and a group called the Task Force on Sexism urged the California State Board of Education to reject dozens of reading and literature textbooks because of their sexism. Feminists lined up to testify against the textbooks at public hearings and gathered signatures and testimony from large numbers of sympathetic academics. Letters started arriving at the Holt offices with precise counts of the number of females and males represented in the text and artwork. Holt's California representative cautioned the home office that "the movement is gaining momentum like you have never seen in this state and I am sure that it is going to spread to every other state in the same manner."

Even in Texas, known for its conservatism, the state board of education reacted to complaints from feminists. It ruled in 1973 that textbooks henceforth would have to present both men and women in a

variety of roles and activities, including "women in leadership and other positive roles with which they are not traditionally identified." This directive coexisted with the Texas board's existing mandate that textbooks promote citizenship, patriotism, and "respect for recognized authority," while excluding any selections "which contribute to civil disorder, social strife, or flagrant disregard of the law." In the fall of 1974, feminists in Oregon and Arizona joined the protests against reading textbooks, and Holt internally decided to issue a special revised "California edition" for California, Oregon, and Arizona.

As feminists raised the heat on textbook publishers, other critics objected to the depiction of race and ethnicity in literature books. In 1974, a group in California called the Standing Committee to Review Textbooks from a Multicultural Perspective identified racism in such phrases as "the deputy's face darkened," "the afternoon turned black," and "it's going to be a black winter." This committee also complained that the reading textbooks were unacceptably biased toward Judeo-Christian teaching, ignoring other religious traditions.

As they began revising the reading books to meet feminist and multicultural demands, the Holt editors quickly concluded that the next edition would have to contain a precise ratio of at least 50 percent females and a representation of minority groups based on their percentage of the population. The editors began fumbling their way toward a consensus about portraying women and ethnic minorities. They agreed they would show American Indians in business suits, not in traditional "hides and headress." Girls would be pictured fixing a bicycle tire, not looking for a boy to do it, and a "Caucasian boy or man would be shown unashamedly crying if the situation were appropriate." Girls would be seen working with electricity, studying insects, and solving math problems, while boys would read poetry, chase butterflies, and pay attention to their personal appearance. Older people would not be depicted as living in nursing homes, wearing glasses, and using canes or wheelchairs. Almost overnight, the editors became absorbed in images, stereotypes, males cooking, and females driving tractor trailers.

Even the editors of Holt's high school literature series (*Concepts in Literature*) joined the effort to expunge older literary works that reflected outmoded views about women and minorities and to increase the representation of authors from these groups. Literary quality became secondary to representational issues. The female editor in

charge of the high school series lamented that many of "the best modern works by and about members of these groups" were unacceptable for textbooks because of their language and "candid subject matter." Worse, from Holt's point of view, "attempts to have authors modify such works have rarely met with success." Recognized authors of "the best modern works" by and about women and minorities refused to permit the bowdlerization (or "adaptation," as the editors put it) of their writings to meet the publisher's need for stories that had no offensive language and the right head count of females and minorities.

During 1975, as the textbooks were being revised, the Holt editors worked with a numerical quota system, imposed by their own internal guidelines. These guidelines directed them to "familiarize yourself with the latest U.S. population figures so that our materials reflect current statistics. . . . Counting and chart-keeping should not be regarded as a useless editorial exercise. Careful tallies and analysis of how people are represented will reduce the need for costly reprint corrections and may prevent the loss of an adoption."

Trying to comply with these directives, the editors began searching, almost frantically, for new stories to increase the representation of females and minorities. In the internal exchange of memos, Bernard J. Weiss, the editor of the reading series, frequently admitted that a proposed story lacked literary quality but at least it had the right gender and ethnic representation. He said about one story: "I like the ethnic aspect. I like the use of a girl as the lead. I don't like the story. The urban setting is a plus." Another story was added that the editors agreed was "not great literature," but "We gain two points—a female leading character and characters with Spanish-American names." Weiss observed of another selection: "I agree that this story has very little literary merit. . . . However, it does help us to achieve some ethnic balance in a very *unbalanced* book." Stories were freely rewritten to change a character's job or role or ethnicity, even their gender. The editors changed the gender of the main character in Judy Blume's story "Freddie in the Middle," which became "Maggie in the Middle," with the author's consent (in the same story, Mrs. Jay became Mrs. Chang, to increase ethnic representation). In another story, a grandmother was added to increase the count of elderly persons in the book. Some stories were added to the revised edition even though Weiss thought they were of poor quality, in order to boost the number of female characters. After extensive revisions, an editor reported numerical success for

one volume in the series: "The in-house count shows 146 female and 146 male characters, or a ratio of 1:1. Animal characters were not included in this count."

Despite Holt's valiant efforts to balance its characters by gender and ethnicity, the 1977 revised edition came under fire from feminists and multiculturalists anyway. Seattle's Ethnic Bias Review Committee found the new edition "unacceptable" because "while blacks are emphasized, it is a narrow representation of those in athletics and music," and besides, one of the books contained intolerable ethnic stereotypes: a black waiter and an Asian cook. A textbook adoption committee in New Mexico was not satisfied with Holt's statistics showing the proportion of characters by gender and minority status; it demanded to know the ethnic balance of both characters and authors. (Holt promptly responded with a list identifying their authors as Black, Puerto Rican, Oriental, American Indian, Hispanic, Jewish, Dutch, Polish, Greek, German, Italian, Scandinavian, Japanese, French, or Indian, as well as a breakdown of all main characters by gender and race.)

In 1980, the education task force of Texas NOW battered the Holt readers yet again at state textbook hearings. Holt's editors thought they had achieved a perfect 1:1 balance of male and female characters, but the Texas feminists said that when they added in animals, males actually outnumbered females by 2:1. A feminist critic pointed out "Children of this age are influenced by a story about Mr. Rabbit just as much as they are by a story about Mr. Jones." Reeling from the latest criticism, the Holt editors invited a feminist critic from Texas, members of the California committee that evaluated textbooks for sexism and racism, and the director of CIBC to review the company's bias guidelines.

Editors at Holt learned to look at every potential story through a political lens: What might anger the religious right? What might anger feminists and representatives of racial minorities? Does the story have a strong female character or a positive portrayal of an ethnic minority? Every entry, every chapter, every volume was measured against a detailed checklist to ensure that there was the right proportion of males, females, and minorities; even workbooks, drill sheets, and spelling exercises were carefully scrutinized, because California officials would reject the entire series if there was a gender imbalance in any part of it, including workbooks and drill sheets. At the same



time that Holt editors were balancing these political demands, they were also simplifying the vocabulary of their readers, in response to complaints that they were too hard.

Occasionally Holt editors reminded themselves that the purpose of the reading series was to teach children to read, but their internal notes show that discussion of literary quality, pedagogical effectiveness, and interest level steadily diminished.

Ultimately, however, it proved impossible to please everyone. Holt did a better job of reaching out to left-wing pressure groups than to those on the right. The supervising editor of reading books at Holt described right-wingers as the kind of "censors" that one finds in "totalitarian societies," but characterized left-wing critics as "positive pressure groups," with whom the editors were prepared to collaborate. The more that Holt pleased "positive pressure groups" by increasing their feminist and multicultural content, the more the books offended conservatives. In the mid-1980s, conservative Christians in Tennessee sued their children's school district to stop them from mandating the Holt readers. Eventually the school district won, but afterward the publishing company let the Holt Basic Reading series go out of print. There were no more revisions. The Holt textbooks were destroyed by the censors of left and right. The textbooks became victims in a political Ping-Pong game that doomed them.

In my role as historian-detective, I searched for additional evidence of the influence of political pressures on textbooks. I asked several major publishers for access to their files related to these issues and, unsurprisingly, got polite turndowns. However, I did get a positive response from Blouke Carus, the founder of Open Court, which had been sold to McGraw-Hill in the mid-1990s. Since he no longer owned the business, Carus agreed to share letters and documents about its experiences in dealing with political pressures.

Open Court began publishing its reading books for elementary school in the mid-1960s. Unlike most other readers, which were a mélange of reading lessons and miscellaneous stories, the Open Court books were purposefully based on a traditionalist philosophy. As Carus wrote in an internal memo in the early days of the company, "We believe a solid dose of good literature in the tradition of the humanities, well taught, will do more than any other single thing to help chil-

dren develop taste and judgment in the written and spoken word."<sup>14</sup> The reading lessons were grounded in phonics (at a time when phonics was out of favor among pedagogues), and the stories were carefully selected examples of high-quality classic children's literature (myths, fairy tales, legends, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Rabbit*, "Horatius at the Bridge," etc.), along with biographies of famous people and hero tales. Open Court's primary goal was to teach children to read, which it apparently did with great success, but the publisher also aimed to convey a rich and positive immersion in the Anglo-American cultural heritage.

Almost as soon as the readers were published, the political complaints began to arrive. Some came from the right wing, which objected to stories about evolution; some came from African Americans, who wanted more attention to black heroes; eventually, most came from feminists criticizing the books' gender imbalance. The publisher at first tried to defend the books by reminding critics that they were a reading and literature program, not a social studies curriculum, but that got him nowhere. He told right-wing critics that if he excluded entries because he didn't agree with the author's political views, then he would have to eliminate everything by writers like Mark Twain and Benjamin Franklin, as well as Greek mythology; that too got him nowhere. As the books were revised, stories that offended the right and the left were quietly dropped, and new ones were added to plump up the number of ethnic and female characters.

It wasn't enough. In 1974, California rejected the Open Court readers because the books did not give appropriate representation to females and ethnic groups. The head of the State Curriculum Framework section of the state education department said that the books were unacceptable because they "contained old fashioned material and reflected against girls and ethnic groups." The state considered the books derogatory toward these groups because they did not have equal numbers of males and females and did not portray them in roles of equal status, especially in myths and fairy tales; the same went for ethnic groups, who were seldom included in European fairy tales and Greek myths. Losing the adoption meant that the state would not pay for the books if districts wanted to buy them. This was a huge disappointment for Open Court. A district superintendent in Fort Bragg, California, complained to the state education department that "the same rationale could place The Bible, Rubiyatt of Omar Khayan [sic],

Grimm's Fairy Tales, and Tales from the Decameron on the undesirable list."

After Open Court lost the California adoption, feminist organizations continued to criticize its books as sexist. Although the books contained references to women such as Mary McLeod Bethune, Pochontas, Helen Keller, Joan of Arc, Anne Frank, Shirley Chisholm, Edith Cavell, and Mahalia Jackson, there were far more male heroes in the classic tales.

Eager to gain acceptance in California, the publisher invited representatives from NOW and other feminist organizations to collaborate on the revision. These groups identified stories about female heroes, including Elizabeth Blackwell, Marian Anderson, Susan B. Anthony, Harriet Tubman, Jane Addams, Mary Cassatt, Elizabeth I, and Amelia Earhart, which were incorporated into the new edition of the readers.

While Open Court was revising, its reading series came under attack in Teaneck, New Jersey, where one group of parents charged that the books were racist and sexist, while other parents praised them, saying that their children were learning to read well. When the readers came up for approval, the Teaneck Board of Education only narrowly approved them by a 5-4 margin, despite the fact that both white and black children who used the Open Court books were performing better than their peers in other reading programs.

In the fall of 1975, Open Court resubmitted its readers for adoption in California. Once again, they were rejected, because they still failed the state's demand for strict gender equality, both in numbers and roles. Open Court appealed the decision, complaining that the state unfairly objected to any portrayal of women in any household role, and, "further, one of these objections pertains to a quick reference to Mother Hubbard. . . . It is our belief that California law does not proscribe representation of traditional folk tales. . . . We therefore are not sure that Mother Hubbard can be accurately described as a stereotyped figure." The state also rejected Open Court's whimsical illustrations, which it called "simplistic and dehumanizing." Again, Open Court appealed, saying that the state guidelines did not require realistic art. The state also complained that the Open Court readers contained too many stories about animals; the publisher objected that nothing in the law banned anthropomorphic folktales. Even *The Little Engine That Could* was criticized by the state evaluators as gender

imbalanced because the engine was portrayed as male (in future revisions, the engine was identified as female).

After this rejection, the publisher and his staff engaged in frank internal discussions about the propriety of "improving" classic folktales by changing the gender or ethnicity of its characters. The editors agreed that the readers would have to be balanced by race, gender, and culture, which was a commercial necessity. They were insistent that the books would "remain securely anchored in Western culture, particularly Anglo-Western culture," and that their content would distinguish them from other mass-market readers, which they called "the same old mush."

Open Court's efforts to win a spot on the California adoption list landed them in hot water with the right-wing textbook critics Mel and Norma Gabler. In 1979, the Gablers' "Recommended Textbook List for Private Schools" praised Open Court's phonetic reading methods but criticized the content: "During the 1960s the content was very good. However, we understand that the content was changed somewhat for the worse (evolution, integration, etc.) beginning with the 1970 edition. The greatest change came with the 1976 edition which added 'realistic' content (negative and depressing) and changed many of the pictures to gaudy 'contemporary' illustrations." Blouke Carus continued to receive letters from angry right-wing parents, complaining about the use of terms like *spelling demon* and *ghost*, which was offensive to their religious views. A parent in Michigan wrote Carus to express her outrage toward a story about a disobedient child, which she was certain had taught her own child to be disobedient. If the story was not promptly deleted, she threatened, she and her husband would "go to any lengths to have this book banned from our school system."

In various districts and states, Open Court continued to be whipsawed between pressure groups. Consistently, however, teachers defended them because their students were reading well. Blouke Carus discovered how difficult it was to create reading textbooks that consisted of strong literature: "What really does present an obstacle to better readers," he wrote to a friend, "are the racial/ethnic/gender 'balance' requirements of the state and district legal compliance commissions. The classics of the culture just simply were not 'fair' in our modern sense." Holding on to them while meeting legal requirements was a tough balancing act, and few other publishers even attempted to

do so. They found it easier to hire freelance writers to write new stories that met all requirements and offended no one rather than to risk losing an adoption.

By the end of the 1980s, every publisher had complied with the demands of the critics, both from left and right. Publishers had imposed self-censorship to head off the outside censors, as well as to satisfy state adoption reviews. Achieving demographic balance and excluding sensitive topics had become more important to their success than teaching children to read or to appreciate good literature. Stories written before 1970 had to be carefully screened for compliance with the bias guidelines; those written after 1970 were unlikely to be in compliance unless written for a textbook publisher. So long as books and stories continue to be strained through a sieve of political correctness, fashioned by partisans of both left and right, all that is left for students to read will be thin gruel.

## *The Mad, Mad, Mad World of Textbook Adoptions*

For it is a mad world and it will get madder if we allow the minorities, be they dwarf or giant, orangutan or dolphin, nuclear-head or water-conversationalist, pro-computerologist or Neo-Luddite, simpleton or sage, to interfere with aesthetics.

—Ray Bradbury, *Coda to Fahrenheit 451*

WHY HAVE publishers of school textbooks willingly and enthusiastically imposed upon themselves the language codes that control what their authors are allowed to write? Why do they bowdlerize text whenever a parent or pressure group complains? The short answer is that they want to sell textbooks, and that they must respond to the demands of their marketplace. To succeed in this highly regulated and politicized environment, it is essential for educational publishers not to become embroiled in controversy.

Unlike general trade books, which are sold to millions of consumers, or college textbooks, which are sold to thousands of individual professors, textbooks prepared for the schools are not sold in an open competitive marketplace. Publishers must invest millions of dollars to “develop” a new textbook series, and their eventual success or failure depends on decisions made by a few large states. The buying and selling of textbooks is more akin to a government procurement process than it is to a real marketplace with consumer choices. The best insurance policy for stability in this highly political environment, these publishers have found, is to live within the confines of a prescriptive set of guidelines to protect them from trouble.

A small number of pressure groups that care passionately how their interests are represented in the textbooks have a large influence on

THE LANGUAGE  
POLICE



*How Pressure Groups Restrict  
What Students Learn*

Diane Ravitch



ALFRED A. KNOPF NEW YORK 2003

## *Forbidden Topics, Forbidden Words*

The greatest dangers to liberty lurk in insidious encroachment by men of zeal, well-meaning but without understanding.

—Justice Louis D. Brandeis

I DECIDED to write this book as a way of solving a mystery. After many years of studying the history of education and writing about the politics of education, I discovered some things that shocked me. Almost by accident, I stumbled upon an elaborate, well-established protocol of beneficent censorship, quietly endorsed and broadly implemented by textbook publishers, testing agencies, professional associations, states, and the federal government. I did not learn about this state of affairs in one fell swoop, but one step at a time. Like others who are involved in education, be they parents or teachers or administrators or journalists or scholars, I had always assumed that textbooks were based on careful research and designed to help children learn something valuable. I thought that tests were designed to assess whether they had learned it. What I did not realize was that educational materials are now governed by an intricate set of rules to screen out language and topics that might be considered controversial or offensive. Some of this censorship is trivial, some is ludicrous, and some is breathtaking in its power to dumb down what children learn in school.

Initially these practices began with the intention of identifying and excluding any conscious or implicit statements of bias against African

Americans, other racial or ethnic minorities, and females, whether in tests or textbooks, especially any statements that demeaned members of these groups. These efforts were entirely reasonable and justified. However, what began with admirable intentions has evolved into a surprisingly broad and increasingly bizarre policy of censorship that has gone far beyond its original scope and now excises from tests and textbooks words, images, passages, and ideas that no reasonable person would consider biased in the usual meaning of that term.

The story that I now tell began in 1997, when President Bill Clinton delivered his State of the Union address. On that occasion, Clinton declared his support for national tests, and said that the states should test fourth-grade children in reading and eighth-grade children in mathematics, to make sure that they could meet national standards of proficiency. Soon after the president gave that speech, the U.S. Department of Education contracted with test publishers to develop voluntary national tests of reading and mathematics for those grades. The goal was to provide individual test scores to parents of specific children, to their teachers, and to their schools.

As someone who had been active in supporting the movement for academic standards during the 1980s and 1990s, both as a private citizen and as an assistant secretary in the U.S. Department of Education during the administration of President George H. W. Bush, I applauded Clinton's proposal. When Bush launched his education reform initiative in 1991, he too called for national achievement testing for individual students. His plan never got off the ground, however, due to the inherently controversial nature of involving the federal government in decisions that usually belong to state and local governments; his fellow Republicans opposed it, as did the Democrats in Congress.

I supported Clinton's program for national testing, but feared that it would falter unless it was strictly nonpartisan. If it remained under the control of political appointees in the Department of Education, it would lose credibility, whatever they did, their decisions would be criticized by members of the other party in Congress, and the testing program would come under a cloud. I made that argument in an op-ed article in the *Washington Post*, urging the administration to transfer responsibility for the new tests from the Department of Education to the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), a nonpartisan federal agency that had been supervising national testing since 1990.

Why, you might wonder, was there a controversy over national testing if there was already a federal agency giving national tests? Let me explain.

Since 1969, the federal government has administered a test called the National Assessment of Educational Progress (known as NAEP, or "the nation's report card"). NAEP tests are given to national and state samples of students in reading, mathematics, writing, science, history, and other academic subjects. NAEP periodically reports on the aggregate achievement of American students in the fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades, but by law it cannot measure the academic performance of any particular school district, school, or individual student. NAEP is the only regular, consistent national measure of achievement in the United States (the SAT and ACT test only college-bound students). In 1990, Congress created NAGB as a nonpartisan citizens' board to supervise NAEP; NAGB is composed of a score of independent members, appointed by the secretary of education. NAGB has a reputation for integrity, and it seemed the right place to assign control of the new national tests that might eventually be given to millions of individual children, not just statistical samples of students. Putting the two testing programs into the same organization would also assure that the new tests proposed by Clinton for individual students would be as academically rigorous as the NAEP tests.

After my op-ed article appeared, advocating the transfer of control of the national tests, Clinton nominated me as a member of NAGB (and announced it on his weekly radio broadcast). He also accepted my suggestion to assign responsibility for his testing proposal to that board. When I joined the board at its first meeting in 1998, I discovered that Clinton's proposed voluntary national tests (VNT) had become an important agenda item. The board spent many hours discussing the development of the new tests, trying to figure out for whom they would be voluntary (for states? for school districts? for schools? for students?), how they would relate to the established standards of NAEP, what time of year they would be given, how long they would last, how to accommodate students with special needs, whether to offer them in any language other than English, and a variety of other prickly issues.

Congress never approved the VNT. The tests were controversial from the start. Many Republicans feared that any national test commissioned by the government was the first step on a slippery slope

toward federal control of education. Many Democrats objected to the emphasis on testing as opposed to new general-purpose funding. By the time Clinton left office in January 2001, his VNT proposal was dead, even though it consistently ranked high in public-opinion polls. For nearly three years, however, NAGB and the test publishers who won the federal contract worked faithfully to bring the idea to fruition, keeping a watchful eye on Congress to see whether it would eventually be authorized. It never was.

During the time that the VNT was a live possibility, the first priority was to create test questions. As a new member of the board, I was assigned to a committee that reviewed reading passages for the fourth-grade test. The committee included experienced teachers and a state superintendent of education. All of us read the passages submitted by the test contractor, a major publisher that had won a multimillion-dollar contract from the Department of Education. The committee approved passages that seemed appropriate for fourth-grade students and rejected passages that seemed dull, obscure, or incoherent. Our goal was to find short reading passages of about one to three pages, both fiction and nonfiction, written in language that was clear, vivid, and engaging, as well as test questions that gauged children's comprehension of what they had read.

Our committee evaluated many passages for fourth-grade students. The passages had been previously published in children's magazines or anthologies; before they reached us, they had been thoroughly vetted by the original publisher's in-house experts. We too read them with care. As stewards of the VNT, we knew that we had to exercise extreme caution, since parents, teachers, and the media in every part of the United States would complain if anything inaccurate or contested were to slip through unnoticed.

Most of the stories were unobjectionable; none was great literature, but for the most part, they were fairly engaging stories about children, animals, science, or history. Nearly two years later, I was surprised to learn that the passages approved by our committee had subsequently been evaluated yet again by the test contractor's "bias and sensitivity review" panel. This panel, it turned out, recommended the elimination of several stories that we had approved. I learned that it was standard operating procedure in the educational testing industry to submit all passages and test questions to a bias and sensitivity review. Typically those who serve on these review panels are not drawn from academic

fields such as English or history. Usually they have a professional background in bilingual education, diversity training, English as a second language, special education, guidance, or the education of Native Americans or other special populations. Such panels are hired by publishers, as well as by state education agencies, to screen every test and every textbook for potential bias. In the case of the voluntary national tests, the panel that scrutinized the items found biases that none of us—neither test experts nor members of NAGB—had perceived.

When publishers of textbooks and tests conduct bias and sensitivity reviews, these reviews are never released to the public; they are proprietary materials, and they belong to the company. I could not find a publisher willing to release them. State education departments guard the results of their bias reviews with equal zeal, even though these should be available for public scrutiny as public documents. I saw the bias and sensitivity reviews for the VNT only because I was a member of NAGB's reading committee; having reviewed the passages, I had the right to know why bias reviewers wanted to eliminate some of them.

When I read the panelists' reasons for rejecting passages, I realized that their concept of bias was not the same as the common understanding of the term. As far as I could tell, they did not actually find any examples of racial or gender bias as most people understand it. There were no stories in which girls or children who were members of a racial or ethnic minority were portrayed in a demeaning way. Some of the panel's interpretations were, frankly, bizarre. When NAGB's reading committee convened by teleconference to discuss the recommendations of the bias panel, there was first an embarrassed silence. Then, one by one, each of us chimed in and expressed our own disagreement with the bias reviewers. We eventually agreed, by unanimous vote, to reject their recommendations.

There are always other test passages to use, so the acceptance or rejection of these particular passages is hardly a cause for alarm. What is alarming, however, is the absurd reasoning that was invoked to justify the elimination of these readings. Consider that the test contractor, Riverside Publishing, is responsible for one of the most esteemed tests in the nation, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills; consider that it assembled a reputable and experienced group of people to conduct the bias and sensitivity review. The judgments expressed by this panel were not idiosyncratic; they represented state-of-the-art thinking in the practice of bias review. The reviewers acted in compliance with

what are considered industry standards. The process of analyzing text that I will describe is now being applied routinely to other tests and textbooks used in American schools. The bias and sensitivity reviewers work with assumptions that have the inevitable effect of stripping away everything that is potentially thought-provoking and colorful from the texts that children encounter. These assumptions narrow what children are exposed to, at least on tests and in textbooks. Parents, teachers, and the public need to be aware of these assumptions and the reasoning process behind them, because they are reducing the curriculum in the schools to bland pabulum.

So what did the bias and sensitivity reviewers recommend? The only way to explain their strained interpretations is to give actual examples. I cannot reproduce the stories, because some of them may yet appear one day as test passages. But I will paraphrase the story sufficiently so that the reader may judge whether the charge of bias is persuasive. The examples, I believe, will demonstrate that the concept of bias has become detached from its original meaning and has been redefined into assumptions that defy common sense.

#### THE HISTORY AND USES OF PEANUTS

Two of the stories that the bias reviewers rejected were short informational passages about peanuts. One passage described peanuts as legumes, in the same family as peas and beans, and lauded them as nutritious. The bias panel recommended the elimination of this selection because it asserted that peanuts are a healthy snack. It was wrong to describe peanuts as nutritious, said the panel, because some people may have a severe allergic reaction to them. At first glance, this judgment would seem to lie outside the scope of a bias and sensitivity review. The reviewers apparently assumed that a fourth-grade student who was allergic to peanuts might get distracted if he or she encountered a test question that did not acknowledge the dangers of peanuts. The NAGB reading committee recommended keeping the passage and adding an acknowledgment that some people are allergic to peanuts.

The second passage was a brief history of peanuts. It said that peanuts were first cultivated by South American Indians, especially the Incas. After Spanish explorers conquered the Incas, and Por-

tuguese explorers defeated many Brazilian tribes, it said, the peanut was shipped to Europe for cultivation. Later, in the United States, African slaves planted and developed peanut crops. The famed scientist George Washington Carver discovered hundreds of uses for the peanut. This was not the world's most exciting story, but the NAGB reading committee concluded that it contained some interesting historical information as well as praise for an African American scientist, all of which were pluses. However, the bias and sensitivity panelists opposed the passage for two reasons: first, it used the term *African slave*, and second, it stated that Spanish and Portuguese explorers defeated native tribes. To the NAGB reading committee, these were puzzling judgments. Why was it wrong to use the term *African slave*? (Apparently the correct usage now is *enslaved African*.) Nor did we understand why the panel wanted to kill the passage for saying that some Brazilian tribes had been defeated by European explorers. The bias reviewers did not challenge the historical accuracy of this statement, but they did not want it to appear. They must have concluded that these facts would hurt someone's feelings. Whose feelings would be wounded? Children of Spanish descent? Children of Portuguese descent? Children descended from Brazilian tribes? Perhaps the word *tribe* was offensive. None of this was clear. What was clear, however, was that the passage did not express anything that a reasonable person would consider biased toward any group.

#### WOMEN AND PATCHWORK QUILTING

The bias and sensitivity reviewers rejected a passage about patchwork quilting by women on the western frontier in the mid-nineteenth century. The passage explained that mothers in that time taught their daughters to sew, and together they made quilts for the girl's dowry when she married. Quilting was an economic necessity because it saved money, and there were no factory-made quilts available until the end of the nineteenth century. The passage briefly explained how quilts were assembled and described them as works of art. The information in the passage was historically accurate, but the bias and sensitivity panel (as well as the "content expert panel") objected to the passage because it contained stereotypes of females as "soft" and "submissive." Actually, the passage did nothing of the sort. It was a



description of why quilting was important to women on the frontier and how it was done. Nothing in the passage excluded the possibility that mothers and daughters were riding the range, plowing the fields, and herding cattle during the day. The reviewers objected to the portrayal of women as people who stitch and sew, and who were concerned about preparing for marriage. Historical accuracy was no defense for this representation of women and girls, which they deemed stereotypical.

#### THE BLIND MOUNTAIN CLIMBER

One of the stranger recommendations of the bias and sensitivity panel involved a true story about a heroic young blind man who hiked to the top of Mount McKinley, the highest peak in North America. The story described the dangers of hiking up an icy mountain trail, especially for a blind person. The panel voted 12-11 to eliminate this inspiring story. First, the majority maintained that the story contained "regional bias," because it was about hiking and mountain climbing, which favors students who live in regions where those activities are common. Second, they rejected the passage because it suggested that people who are blind are somehow at a disadvantage compared to people who have normal sight, that they are "worse off" and have a more difficult time facing dangers than those who are not blind.

"Regional bias," in this instance, means that children should not be expected to read or comprehend stories set in unfamiliar terrain. A story that happened in a desert would be "biased" against children who have never lived in a desert, and a story set in a tropical climate would be biased against those who have never lived in a tropical climate. Consider the impoverishment of imagination that flows from such assumptions: No reading passage on a test may have a specific geographical setting; every event must occur in a generic locale. Under these assumptions, no child should be expected to understand a story set in a locale other than the one that he or she currently lives in or in a locale that has no distinguishing characteristics.

Even more peculiar is the assumption by the panel's majority that it is demeaning to applaud a blind person for overcoming daunting obstacles, like climbing a steep, icy mountain trail. It is not unreasonable, I believe, to consider blindness to be a handicap for a person fac-

#### GENDER BIAS IN A FABLE OF AESOP

The bias and sensitivity reviewers did find a reading selection that had the earmarks of gender bias. It was Aesop's familiar fable "The Fox and the Crow." In the story, Master Fox spies Mistress Crow sitting on a tree branch with a piece of cheese in her beak. He flatters her, tells her that she has a beautiful voice, and when she opens her beak to sing, the cheese falls to the cunning fox. The panel, of course, spied gender bias at work since the crow—a female—is vain and foolish, while the fox—a male—is intelligent and clever. The crow represented the stereotypical depiction of women as overly concerned about their appearance and easily deceived by flattering men. The fact that this gender relationship had been part of the Aesop story for generations was irrelevant. The NAGB reading committee did not want to lose the Aesop fable, because it was all too rare to find any instances of classic literature on national tests of reading. So, to ameliorate the concerns of the bias committee, we proposed to switch the gender of the fox and the crow, either to make them both the same gender, or to make Mistress Fox the flatterer of Master Crow. Aesop might be startled to find a woman flattering a man or a guy flattering another guy or a woman flattering another woman, but at least we were able to hang on to a classic fable.

#### A STORY CONDEMNED BY ASSOCIATION

Another passage suggested for deletion by the bias reviewers was an animal fable taken from an anthology edited by William J. Bennett, the former secretary of education, author, and political commentator

poor children who had grown up in a housing project would see themselves as insects living in a rotting tree stump if they read this passage. Following the logic of the bias reviewers, every story had to be read literally, with no allowances for simile, metaphor, or allusion.

#### THE SILLY OLD LADY

The bias panel rejected a passage about a silly old woman who keeps piling more and more gadgets on her bicycle until it is so overloaded that it tumbles over. The language was clever, the illustrations were amusing, and the story was higher in literary quality than the other fourth-grade reading passages proposed for the test. But the bias panel rejected it. They felt that it contained a negative stereotype of an eccentric old woman who constantly changed her mind; apparently women, and especially women of a certain age, must be depicted only in a positive light. Why would it upset or distract fourth-grade children to see an older woman acting eccentrically or changing her mind? The bias panel thought that children would get the wrong idea about older women if they read such a story. They might conclude that all women of a certain age behaved in this way.

#### THE ARROGANT KING

This story, a folktale from Asia, was about a king who had a marvelous elephant. The king is jealous because his subjects admire the elephant more than they admire him. He tells the elephant trainer to command the animal to do more and more difficult tricks, until the elephant ascends into the air with the trainer and flies away to a better kingdom. In the original story, the wise king in the next kingdom eventually reduces the worthless king to ashes, but that "violent" conclusion was deleted by an earlier bias review. The bias panel rejected the passage because the king was portrayed as mean and jealous. The panelists did not like this negative characterization, even though the king was indeed mean and jealous. Furthermore, the king used harsh language; he yelled, he roared, he screamed, and he shouted at the elephant's trainer. Of course, if the king had been a mild and friendly fellow, the story would not have made any sense at all, but the bias panel did not approve of such behavior. The panelists also objected because the trainer had called the king "a worthless fool" when he flew

away with the beautiful elephant. But the trainer was right: the king *was* a worthless fool. I could not imagine what any of these complaints had to do with bias and sensitivity. Was the passage biased against arrogant and jealous kings? Were they afraid that children would be upset to read about a king who yelled and screamed at an underling?

#### THE EVEN EXCHANGE

This story came from a children's book by an African American author. It was about an African American girl who wanted to learn how to jump rope like the other girls in her neighborhood. She meets a neighbor who is an expert at jumping rope, but who is attending summer school because she is not very good at math. The new girl is good at math, so the two agree to teach each other what they do best. The bias reviewers did not like this story at all. They found that it had serious bias problems because it showed an African American girl who was weak in math and was attending summer school. The fact that this character thought of herself as not very good at math was also deeply offensive and stereotypical, the bias reviewers believed. Even though the author was African American and her book was intended to bolster the self-esteem of black girls, that did not carry any weight with the bias panel. African American children could be portrayed only in a positive light. Anything that showed weakness suggested negative stereotyping. In this case, one African American girl was good at math, and the other was not. So far as I could tell, the story showed human variability, not negative racial stereotyping, with each girl displaying different weaknesses and different strengths.

#### THE SELFISH RICH BAKER

This tale was about a rich baker who got angry when a poor traveler sniffed his wares. The baker goes to court to demand that the poor fellow pay him for the smells he had "stolen." The judge, however, rules in favor of the poor man and fines the rich baker for his meanness. The bias committee unanimously opposed the passage on grounds of socioeconomic bias. The panelists claimed that the story set up an antagonism between the rich baker and the poor traveler. It presumed the poor traveler to be guilty of doing something wrong because of his poverty. Of course, the story did no such thing. The rich baker was

rebuked and fined for his arrogance and hostility, begrudging the poor traveler even a whiff of his baked goods. He was judged harshly for his lack of charity and his greed. I could not understand how reviewers could regard this passage as biased against the poor traveler unless they failed to grasp the point of the story.

#### THE FRIENDLY DOLPHIN

This passage was about dolphins and what wonderful creatures they are. It told the story of a legendary dolphin that guided ships through a dangerous channel. Perhaps in anticipation of a bias review, the story left out the part of the legend in which a passenger on one ship shoots the faithful dolphin, which survives but never guides that particular ship again. Fourth graders would probably enjoy reading about dolphins, particularly ones that befriend humans. No matter; the bias reviewers unanimously rejected the story for having a regional bias in favor of those who live by the sea. Once again, the concept of regional bias presumes that any story that takes place in a singular location—the sea, the mountains, the desert, a forest, the jungle—is inherently inaccessible to those who don't live in the same location.

#### NO MORE OWLS

The passage about owls was like a children's encyclopedia entry. It described how their keen eyesight and hearing enabled them to hunt at night for rodents. When I saw that this passage was rejected, I imagined that it was because of the violence associated with hunting (although that's how owls survive). I was wrong. The passage was rejected because a Native American member of the bias committee said that owls are taboo for the Navajos. Consequently the entire committee agreed that the passage should be dropped. The test publisher added a notation that the owl is associated with death in some other cultures and should not be mentioned anymore, neither in texts nor in illustrations.

Here is a classic problem presented by today's bias and sensitivity review process. If any cultural group attributes negative connotations to anything, or considers it taboo or offensive, then that topic will not be referred to, represented, described, or illustrated on tests. But owls exist. They are real birds. They are not creatures of the imagination.

Nevertheless, to avoid giving offense, the tests will pretend that owls don't exist. Owls are to be deleted and never again mentioned to the highly vulnerable and sensitive American schoolchild.

#### AN AFRICAN AMERICAN HERO

This passage, which was enthusiastically endorsed by the NAGB reading committee, should have been an easy selection. It told the heroic story of Mary McLeod Bethune, who opened a school for African American girls in Daytona Beach, Florida, in the early twentieth century. Her school, the Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls, opened with five girls and her own son Albert as pupils. Bethune had a dream but not much money. Residents of the neighborhood helped out, and students raised money for their tuition. Bethune proved to be a masterful fund-raiser, gaining the support of several wealthy white philanthropists who wintered in Daytona Beach, as well as the National Association of Colored Women.

The bias reviewers disliked the story. They wanted no reference to Bethune's son, because the story couldn't mention the son without mentioning his father. If it mentioned the father, it would have to acknowledge that Bethune and her husband had separated when she moved to Florida; to avoid mentioning separation or divorce, the reviewers wanted no mention of the son. Next, the reviewers objected to the name of the school because it included the word *Negro*. Ditto for the reference to the National Association of Colored Women. These references, the bias reviewers asserted, would be meaningless to the students and objectionable to adults who might see the test. Last, the bias reviewers strongly opposed any mention of Bethune's successful fund-raising among the wealthy white residents of Daytona Beach, which they considered patronizing. The fact that she did receive substantial funds from men like John D. Rockefeller was irrelevant. The bias committee objected to Bethune's need to "turn to" such people.

These objections, on their face, are absurd. To leave her son out of her life story as a way of avoiding the reality that she separated from her husband assumes that today's children would find this shocking; surely they are sufficiently acquainted with women who are single parents to accept this unexceptional fact. Further, the name of Beth-

une's school is historically accurate. It is difficult to tell a story about her school without using the name that she gave it. And why treat as an embarrassment Bethune's remarkable skills as a fund-raiser? Anyone, black or white, who could convince some of the richest men in America to support her endeavors deserves commendation. This is not an admission of weakness, but evidence of skill in the arts of persuasion. In the tightly constricted world of the bias reviewers, Bethune created a successful institution by conducting neighborhood bake sales. It would be admirable if true, but it was not true. Truth and historical accuracy, however, are not important values to the bias reviewers.

Since the voluntary national test proposed by Clinton was never authorized by Congress, it slowly disappeared as an administration proposal and eventually sank from public view. The reader might wonder why the bias reviews of questions on a test that was never given should matter. It matters because these reviews offer an unparalleled insight into the process that publishers use to evaluate reading passages and test items today. This process of review by bias and sensitivity experts is not unusual. It is customary. It did not break any new ground. Publishers of tests and textbooks today routinely engage similar panels of bias and sensitivity experts to screen their products. This is a process that effectively removes everything from tests and textbooks that might be offensive to any group or individual. It is designed to strip away words and ideas that offend anyone. Bias and sensitivity review has evolved into an elaborate and widely accepted code of censorship that is implemented routinely but hidden from public sight.

Where did these strange ideas about bias come from? How did the sensible principle of removing racist and sexist language turn into this effort to delete whatever might annoy or offend the most agitated imaginations? This was the mystery that I wanted to solve.

## *The New Meaning of Bias*

Do you know that Newspeak is the only language in the world whose vocabulary gets smaller every year?

—George Orwell, 1984

FOR MONTHS after I participated in the appraisal of President Clinton's proposed voluntary national test, I continued to reflect on the experience. I could not comprehend how a group of educated and presumably thoughtful adults could have become so priggish, humorless, and censorious. How had they reached their judgments? How could they find bias in apparently innocent language? Why were they willing to dismiss historically accurate facts so blithely? Something was going on that I did not understand. The bias and sensitivity reviewers saw insult in words and ideas that most people would find unexceptional. They employed a set of assumptions that were outside the realm of what seemed to be common sense.

As I tried to understand the reasoning of the reviewers, I remembered that in 1998 the president of Riverside Publishing had met with our committee to explain how reading passages for the voluntary national test would be selected. We expressed our hope that the test would be of high quality, that it would be more than just a basic skills test. We wanted the publisher to include passages based on good literature. We thought that children should read something worthwhile when they took the test, not just banal selections. We asked whether his company would choose some readings drawn from myths and fables and other classic literature. He said that they would try, but we

had to bear in mind that "everything written before 1970 was either gender biased or racially biased." He said this very casually, as though he was uttering a truth too well known to need explanation or defense. This belief provided the backdrop for the document that he gave us that day, titled "Bias and Sensitivity Concerns in Testing."

When I first read this document, I was astonished by the list of topics that the test publisher considered out-of-bounds, and I filed it away. Two years later, in 2000, when I saw the results of the bias and sensitivity review, I retrieved this document and found that it held the key to the reviewers' assumptions. "Bias and Sensitivity Concerns in Testing" explained how the concept of bias had been redefined. It contained rules for self-censorship that most Americans, I believe, would find deeply disturbing.

The Riverside guidelines are a mixture of sensible general reminders about the unacceptability of bias, as well as detailed lists of words and topics that must be avoided on tests. "Bias," it declares, is anything in a test item that might cause any student to be distracted or upset. Bias is the presence of something in a test item that would result in different performance "for two individuals of the same ability but from different subgroups." So, for example, a test question that is upsetting to a member of group A (for instance, a girl) would prevent her from doing as well as someone who was from a different group (for instance, a boy). Bias, says the publisher, can cause inaccurate scores and measurement errors. It seems to be a settled principle that tests should not contain anything that is so upsetting to certain students that they cannot demonstrate what they know and can do. Presumably a very graphic description of violence, for example, would be so disturbing to some students that they would not be able to answer test questions. Presumably students would be upset by a test question that contained language that demeaned their race, gender, or religion. Riverside says that its tests "are designed to avoid language, symbols, gestures, words, phrases, or examples that are generally regarded as sexist, racist, otherwise offensive, inappropriate, or negative towards any group." In addition, tests should not contain any subject matter that anyone might consider "controversial or emotionally charged." Such things would distract test takers and prevent them from showing their true ability. It would be unfair, certainly, and the goal of a bias and sensitivity review is supposed to be fairness.

But then look at where the logic of fairness leads. There are three ways, the guidelines assert, to ensure fairness in testing. One is by "representational fairness," another is by reviewing "language usage," and a third is by removing "stereotypes." In addition, certain inflammatory topics must be avoided. Each of these versions of "fairness" leads the publisher to specify precisely what language and which ideas will be allowed and which will be banned. As I read through the guidelines, I began to understand why the publisher advised us that everything written before 1970 was biased. Few writings before that date could possibly meet the specifications laid out in the guidelines.

The bias guidelines list certain topics that are so controversial or "emotionally charged" that they must be avoided on a test unless they are directly relevant to the curriculum (in a test of reading, no particular subject matter is directly relevant, so all of these topics must be avoided). Such topics are:

- Abortion
- Creatures that are thought to be scary or dirty, like scorpions, rats, and roaches
- Death and disease
- Disrespectful or criminal behavior
- Evolution
- Expensive consumer goods
- Magic, witchcraft, the supernatural
- Personal appearance (such as height and weight)
- Politics
- Religion
- Social problems (such as child abuse, animal abuse, and addiction)
- Unemployment
- Unsafe situations
- Weapons and violence

The guidelines advise that accuracy should be the goal when dealing with historical information, but on a reading test (as we saw in the first chapter) historical accuracy may be sacrificed when it involves stereotypes.

In addition to the list of banned controversial topics, there is an

exhaustive description of "negative" and "sensitive" material that cannot appear on a test. Negative material includes (but is not limited to) parents quarreling, children mistreating each other, children acting disobediently toward their parents, and children showing disrespect for authority. Sensitive material includes paganism, satanism, parapsychology, magic, ghosts, extraterrestrials, Halloween, witches, or anything that might conjure up such subjects, even in the context of fantasy. Anything related to Halloween, such as pumpkins and masks, must be avoided. Gambling must be avoided, as must references to nudity, pregnancy, or giving birth, whether to animals or people. "Controversial" styles of music like rap and rock and roll are out.

But that is not all. Religious and political issues must be avoided. Reading passages must not contain even an "incidental reference" to anyone's religion. There must not be any mention of birthdays or religious holidays (including Thanksgiving), because some children do not have birthday parties and do not share the same religion. In any material about Native Americans, care must be exercised to steer clear of religious traditions.

There must be no reference in any test passage to evolution or the origins of the universe. Writers must avoid any mention of fossils or dinosaurs. Their very existence suggests the banned topic of evolution. However, it is acceptable to refer to "animals of long ago" if there is no mention of how old they are and no suggestion that the existence of these animals implies evolution.

Still more topics are banned as upsetting to sensitive children. There is some overlap with the first set of banned topics, but this list adds some additional caveats. These include:

Someone being fired or losing their job

Rats, mice, roaches, snakes, lice

Cancer or other serious illnesses

Death

Catastrophes such as earthquakes and fires (natural events

like tornados or hurricanes may be okay if the context is not too frightening)

Unnecessary violence (reference to guns or knives is forbidden except in a historical context)

Gratuitous gore, like animals eating other animals

Serious social problems, like poverty, alcoholism, divorce, or addiction of any kind  
Slavery and racial prejudice

The bias guidelines require that test questions "model healthful personal habits." Any references to smoking, drinking, or junk food must be eliminated. Writers must be cautious when depicting someone drinking coffee or tea and must take care not to mention even aspirin. Children must never be shown doing dangerous things, "no matter how good the moral of the story is."

The test passages must avoid beliefs, attitudes, or values that are not embraced by just about everybody. Fables are a particular concern, because they often conclude on a cynical note or have "a pragmatic moral" that someone may find offensive. Particularly taboo, the guidelines warn, is anything that suggests secular humanism, situation ethics, or New Age religion.

The people who select reading passages for tests are directed to seek out "uplifting topics." Anything depressing, disgusting, or scary should be eliminated.

Many topics are prohibited because testing experts agree that any less than ideal context will be so upsetting to some children that they will not be able to do their best on a test. But would children really be distracted if they read a story in which someone was fired or unemployed? Would they be disoriented if they read a story in which someone was seriously ill or parents were divorced? No educational research literature supports these prohibitions. There are no studies that show that children were unable to finish a test or do their best because they were asked to read a story in which the characters were rich or poor. Farewell then to *Great Expectations*, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, and "The Little Match Girl," with their unacceptable images of wealth and poverty.

The prohibitions are there not because of research findings, but because the *topics upset some adults*, who assume that they will upset children in the same way. Some adults sincerely believe that children will project themselves into everything they read and that they will be deeply disturbed to read that someone else is taller than they, or that other children had a birthday party or live in a big house when perhaps they are not similarly privileged. It is hard to imagine that a fourth-

grade student would be paralyzed by dread by reading a story that included descriptions of mice. Clearly forbidden by such a prohibition is any excerpt from books like E. B. White's *Stuart Little* or Robert Lawson's *Ben and Me*, not to mention stories of Mickey Mouse, Mighty Mouse, and other fictional mice beloved by generations of children.

Most of the prohibitions are a direct response to long-standing complaints from the religious right. Many of the banned topics are intended to avert the controversy that might erupt if the test referred to evolution or witchcraft or religion. Spokesmen for the religious right consider any description of behavior they do not like as an endorsement of that behavior. They reject depictions of magic, witchcraft, and the supernatural; they don't want education materials to show people engaging in bad behavior, like children disobeying their parents. They have gone to court in several jurisdictions to protest against "secular humanism," "situation ethics," and "New Age" religion, because such ideas conflict with the moral code that is fixed in the Bible.

Test publishers have found that the best way to avoid controversy is to eliminate anything that might cause controversy. As the bias guidelines of Riverside Publishing show, quite a large number of topics are avoided (i.e., censored) because of fear of complaints by the religious right. But the bias guidelines try to mollify not only conservatives, but also feminists and advocates for multiculturalism, the handicapped, and the aged. The publishers want everyone to be happy, or at least not to be unhappy. Whereas the right gets topic control, the left gets control of language and images. To see how this works, we must consider what the test publisher describes as the three types of fairness: representational fairness, language usage, and stereotyping.

The Riverside guidelines define "representational fairness" to mean that no group will be overrepresented or underrepresented. Thus, with few exceptions, reading passages are supposed to include equal numbers of males and females, and proportionate representation of all groups in terms of ethnicity, age, socioeconomic background, gender, community setting, and physical disabilities. Another way that Riverside defines "representational fairness" is that the materials on tests should be "relevant" to the life experiences of those taking the test. For example, southern students should not be expected to understand the "concepts" of snow and freezing winters, which are outside their own personal life experience. To expect them to know about such weather

conditions when they have not experienced them is considered regional bias.

Language usage refers to the specific words in a test passage or test question, and here the bias guidelines become strongly proscriptive. Gender bias is implied by any use of the term *man*, as in "mankind" or "man in the street" or "salesman." All of these are now forbidden terms that must be replaced by "the human race," the "average citizen," or a "sales representative." Bias against people with a disability occurs whenever a disabled person is identified by that disability. For example, it is biased to refer to "the blind"; one must say instead, "a person who is blind." It is biased to say that someone is "wheelchair bound"; one must refer instead to "a person who uses a wheelchair." It is biased to say that someone was "a victim of polio"; one must refer instead to "a person who had polio." Then there is elitist bias, which is also unacceptable. An example of this bias is the sentence "Even though she was a poor, Hispanic woman, Maria was able to start a successful company." The sentence must be reworded as "Through hard work and determination, Maria Sanchez started a successful company."

It is easy to see how publishers might well conclude that everything written before 1970 is racially biased or gender biased. Certainly John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* makes racial references that are inappropriate under the guidelines (even its title, referring to both mice and men, is unacceptable); so does Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; so do the novels of Richard Wright, Zora Neale Hurston, and James Baldwin. The novels of Jane Austen, Edith Wharton, and Charles Dickens contain what the bias reviewers consider gender stereotypes. The publisher of Riverside was right: Most classic literature is unacceptable when judged by the new rules governing referents to gender, ethnicity, age, and disability.

In addition to representational fairness and language usage, the bias guidelines warn against stereotyping. In the early years of the feminist movement, activists complained that women were shown only as housewives and mothers, rather than as scientists, professionals, and business leaders. African Americans complained that they were portrayed only in subservient roles, rather than as scientists, professionals, and business leaders. The effort to eliminate stereotypes was intended to banish any notion that certain high-status careers and activities were closed to women, blacks, and other minorities.

The definition of stereotyping, like the definition of bias, has

become far more elaborate and refined as time has gone by. Educational publishers know that they must avoid showing people of a certain gender, race, ethnicity, age, or disability group in roles that might contribute to a stereotype. What was once a fairly sensible notion of fairness—don't always show women as homemakers—has turned into a presumption that they should never be shown in that role. The bias guidelines suggest that it is stereotypical to depict women as wives and mothers, even though most women are, at some time in their lives, wives and mothers. Since men cannot be portrayed as wives and mothers, no one may fairly be presented in those roles. Although the guidelines note that "all group members should be portrayed as exhibiting a full range of emotions, occupations, activities, and roles," writers are forewarned that certain representations are not acceptable because of their past history as stereotypes.

The Riverside guidelines warn about the following kinds of stereotypes:

*Emotional stereotyping*, in which men are portrayed as strong and brave, while women are portrayed as weepy and emotional. It is, however, appropriate to show women as strong and brave and men as weepy and emotional. Fairness might allow an equal distribution of these emotions, but the guidelines imply that women must not be shown as weepy and emotional and men must not be shown as brave and strong.

*Occupational stereotyping* means not showing people in roles that are commonly experienced in reality, because opponents of stereotyping hope to change perceptions of convention by not permitting them to be portrayed. So, for example, it is occupational stereotyping to depict an Irish policeman. The fact is that police officers have many different racial and ethnic identities, and historically in some large eastern cities, many were (and are) Irish. But it is stereotyping to show any of them as Irish. Similarly, it is stereotyping to show Asian Americans working in a laundry, even though some Asian Americans do work in laundries. People who work in commercial laundries may be of any ethnic or national origin, but not Asian American. Similarly, African Americans may not be portrayed as maids; this is occupational stereotyping. Only people who are not African Americans are maids, though given the guidelines' strong abhorrence of social distinctions, it is

unlikely that anyone will ever be portrayed as a maid or that anyone can afford to hire a maid. Men may not appear as plumbers and lawyers; women can. Women may not be portrayed as nurses and receptionists; this is stereotyping.

*Activities stereotyping* refers to portrayals of behavior. It is activities stereotyping to show men playing sports or working with tools. It is stereotypical to show women cooking or caring for children or to have older people engaging in sedentary pastimes, like fishing or baking cookies (older people, as we shall see in other guidelines, are usually found jogging, repairing a roof, or doing something else that is physically strenuous).

*Role stereotyping* is only slightly different from occupational stereotyping, but it is different enough to get a separate entry in the Riverside guidelines. Asian Americans should not be portrayed as academics; African Americans should not be portrayed as athletes; Caucasians should not be portrayed as businesspeople; men should not be portrayed as breadwinners; women should not be portrayed as wives and mothers. In the ideal world of education-think, women would be breadwinners; African Americans would be academics; Asian Americans would be athletes; and no one would be a wife or a mother.

*Community setting stereotyping* refers to neighborhoods. It is a stereotype to show Asian Americans living in neighborhoods composed of Asian Americans. It is a stereotype to show African Americans living in an affluent suburb. It is a stereotype to show Caucasians living in an affluent suburb. Since these "stereotypes" represent reality for significant numbers of people, writers must either omit any community setting or always write counter to the stereotype, Asian Americans never living in an Asian American neighborhood, African Americans living in affluent suburbs, and whites living in urban environments. Denying reality is a common feature of writing against stereotype.

*Physical attribute or abilities stereotyping* refers to assumptions about groups, such as that African Americans are good at sports, that men are strong, that women are overly concerned about their appearance, that older people are feeble, and that children are "bundles of



energy." Older people may never be portrayed as feeble even though some older people, approaching the end of their life span, actually are feeble. Though accurate, that would be a stereotype.

A person with the job of writing test questions has the thankless task of portraying American society in all its diversity, without at the same time giving any stereotypical attributes to any person who is portrayed. Thus, while the rest of us might imagine that the purpose of a test is to find out whether students have learned what they studied in class, test developers spend as much time balancing social imperatives as they do on the academic and cognitive content of test questions.

What is the logic of the bias and sensitivity reviews? When I read the Riverside guidelines closely, I realized that the people who originally selected the passages for the voluntary national test of reading in the fourth grade had also been subject to these guidelines. They had already been thoroughly briefed about the need for representational fairness, the dangers of stereotyping, and the importance of avoiding controversial topics. Yet, even these carefully trained professionals did not foresee how narrowly, intensely, and exquisitely the guidelines would be interpreted by another round of bias and sensitivity reviewers.

Presumably, the people who first picked the passages didn't realize that the owl was taboo to the Navajo culture. They didn't stop to think that a story about a blind man climbing up an icy mountain peak contained regional bias against children who are unfamiliar with mountain climbing and was biased against blind people by suggesting that they have more difficulty in meeting physical challenges than those who are not blind. Probably they did not know that Mount Rushmore was a forbidden topic to members of the Lakota tribe. Very likely the people assembling the test passages thought that the story about quilting was an interesting insight into women's lives in the nineteenth century, not realizing that it was gender bias to show an association between females and domestic work. Undoubtedly they thought that the story of Mary McLeod Bethune and her school was inspiring, and it didn't occur to them that the name of her school was offensive, her divorce was controversial, and her fund-raising among affluent white business leaders was objectionable.

This entire process is designed to impose censorship. Topics and

language are banned from the outset. The definition of bias and sensitivity is so broad and so proscriptive that it guarantees the exclusion from national and state tests of many valued works of literature. Whether classic or contemporary, most recognized authors will almost certainly violate the rules about topic or language usage or stereotyping because such authors did not tailor their writing to meet the guidelines. One looks to literature for expressions of imagination, reality, paradox, and complexity rather than carefully crafted orthodoxies. There are stories that are not appropriate for fourth-grade children because of their language or imagery, but none of those censored by the bias reviewers came anywhere near that threshold.

There is no valid educational reason to exclude such a broad list of topics other than to placate the religious right; children should be able to read a test passage about dinosaurs or literary flights of fancy. Similarly, there is no valid educational reason to regulate language usage so tightly other than to placate the feminist and multicultural left; children should be able to read a passage in which a mother prepares dinner or an African American family lives in a city neighborhood without setting off a furor about stereotyping. Furthermore, banning words like "mankind" is just plain silly. By now, our society has evolved to the point where some people will say "humankind" or "the human race" and others will say "mankind." We should be mature enough to live with diversity of language usage. We have never had a language police or a thought police in this country, and we should not have one now.

What kinds of educational materials can survive this heavily proscriptive review? What's left after the language police and the thought police from the left and the right have done their work? Stories that have no geographical location. Stories that have no regional distinctiveness. Stories in which all conflicts are insignificant. Stories in which men are fearful, and women are brave. Stories in which older people are never ill. Stories in which children are obedient, never disrespectful, never get into dangerous situations, never confront problems that cannot be easily solved. Stories in which blind people and people with physical disabilities need no assistance from anyone because their handicaps are not handicaps. Stories in which fantasy and magic are banned. Stories about the past in which historical accuracy is ignored. Stories about science that leave out any reference to evolution or prehistoric times. Stories in which everyone is happy almost all the time. The result of all this relentless purging is dishonesty, a purposeful

shielding of children from anything challenging, controversial, or just plain interesting. It is a process that drains literature of its life and blood, converts it into dreary reading materials, and grinds reading materials into pabulum.

The Riverside bias and sensitivity guidelines are not unique. Indeed, Riverside cites guidelines issued by other test publishers and by the American Psychological Association to show that its recommendations are right in the center of the educational publishing mainstream. Once I understood what the guidelines meant and how they were implemented, I could not shake the feeling that something important and dangerous was happening in American education that few people knew about. The more I thought about the ubiquitous application of censorship at the source, the more it seemed to me to be a major intellectual scandal, the more it looked like political correctness run amok, far from public view.

### THREE

## *Everybody Does It: The Textbook Publishers*

There is more than one way to burn a book. And the world is full of people running about with lit matches.

—Ray Bradbury, *Coda to Fabrenheit* 457

OVER THE THREE decades that I have been working as a historian, I have learned that a historian works like a detective. If a historical controversy captures your attention and you want to find out “what happened,” you have to do a lot of investigation. First, you read what other historians have written. Then you carefully review their evidence, examine primary sources, and begin to shape your own conclusions—your own explanation of what happened. One asks, again and again, How do I know that this is so? Is it logical? What is the evidence? Sometimes your inquiries will confirm the conventional account; in other cases you may be able to find new ways of interpreting the same well-known facts. That is the fun of doing history. It requires patience, some ingenuity, a love of research, and a modicum of irreverence toward the received wisdom. After all, if you are willing to accept unquestioningly what “everyone” says, then the story is over before the investigation begins.

It was in this spirit that I began searching to find out whether the Riverside bias guidelines were unique or typical, and how widespread was the practice of bias and sensitivity review in educational publishing. I wrote to publishing houses to request their bias guidelines, I contacted friends in the industry for help in obtaining guidelines, and I asked colleagues who work in various state and city agencies to

that do this exert a powerful effect on publishers and testing companies.

*Scholarly and professional associations*, like the American Psychological Association, publish bias guidelines that authors for their journals must follow if they want their work to be accepted.

The overlap among all these educational organizations, whether public or private, is so extensive that it is difficult to disentangle them. Because of industry mergers, educational publishing was dominated in the 1990s by four large corporations: Pearson (a British-based company), Vivendi (a French-based company), Reed Elsevier (a Dutch-based company), and McGraw-Hill (an American-based company). The K-12 textbook industry had annual sales in 2001 of more than \$4 billion, according to the Association of American Publishers.

These four conglomerates absorbed many long-established textbook companies in recent years. Pearson owns Scott Foresman-Addison Wesley, Scott Foresman, Silver Burdett, Ginn, Prentice Hall, Modern Curriculum Press, Globe Fearon, NCS, and other imprints. Until 2002 Vivendi owned Houghton Mifflin, McDougal Littell, Riverside Publishing (developer of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills), and other companies. Reed Elsevier owns Harcourt, which includes Harcourt Brace; the Psychological Corporation (which produces the SAT-9 test); Holt, Rinehart and Winston; the GED test; and other companies. McGraw-Hill owns Macmillan, Glencoe, Open Court, SRA, and testing programs such as CTBS and TerraNova.

I was able to get bias guidelines from most of these companies. As far as I could determine, every educational publisher conducts bias and sensitivity reviews; I could not find one that does not subject its material to this procedure. It is a well-established, recognized practice in educational publishing. It is not questioned; it is not controversial. Everybody does it. Most company guidelines are similar to those used by Riverside for the proposed voluntary national test. Some are even more restrictive about the words and phrases that may and may not be published. My guess is that companies are happy to have bias guidelines to shield them against vociferous advocacy groups. The publishers use their guidelines as a form of preemptive capitulation. With these documents, they broadcast to all likely protesters, "Leave us alone; we gave in to your demands long ago."

share whatever bias guidelines they used. Some publishers responded promptly with their guidelines, and others pretended that they didn't exist, but I was usually able to acquire these allegedly nonexistent documents.

Bias guidelines are ubiquitous in the world of kindergarten through twelfth-grade schooling. At one level, this is unsurprising: After all, American society has gone through a long and wrenching period, from the 1960s to the present, in which diligent citizens and public officials have tried to eliminate all vestiges of invidious discrimination against people on grounds of their race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, or disability.

However, as I read current guidelines, it was clear that they went far beyond the original purpose of eliminating bias and had devolved instead into an elaborate language code that bans many common words and expressions. I am not speaking of epithets, scatological terms, ethnic slurs, or name-calling; their unacceptability is so obvious that they are not even mentioned in the guidelines. The guidelines prohibit controversial topics, even when they are well within the bounds of reasonable political and social discourse. They combine left-wing political correctness and right-wing religious fundamentalism, a strange stew of discordant influences. The guidelines aim to create a new society, one that will be completely inoffensive to all parties; getting there, however, involves a heavy dose of censorship. No one asked the rest of us whether we want to live in a society in which everything objectionable to every contending party has been expunged from our reading materials.

Bias guidelines are promulgated by four different kinds of agencies:

*Educational publishers* issue them as directions for their editors, authors, and illustrators, as well as for the bias and sensitivity panels that review materials before publication.

*Test development companies* (most of which belong to educational publishers) give them to people who write test questions (items) or select reading passages for tests, as well as to the bias and sensitivity committees that analyze every test item before it appears on a test.

*States* adopt rules and laws that serve as bias guidelines, describing, sometimes in exacting detail, what must be included or excluded in educational materials. The states

After reading guidelines from several companies, I concluded that the desire to control writers' language and thought processes has become deeply institutionalized in educational publishing. It is no longer an impulse; it is policy. The guidelines regulate what writers are permitted to say about specific groups in society, including women, the elderly, people with disabilities, and members of racial and ethnic minorities. Anything that is published in textbooks must be satisfactory to representatives of these groups, who are invited to review (and censor) whatever pertains to them. All of these groups must be presented only in a positive light.

The guidelines do not fret about censorship. Their purpose is to ensure that textbook writers do not inadvertently use politically unacceptable language. Textbooks must be sensitive; they must not offend anyone. The guidelines ensure conformity of language and thought. With the best of intentions, the publishers have consented to a strict code of censorship.

One might imagine that today's textbooks reflect the best research about how children learn and about how to convey important subject matter. One might suppose that the goal of a good textbook is to teach students needed skills and knowledge. One might think that the purpose of a reading textbook is to teach children to read fluently and with comprehension; that a history textbook is supposed to teach students about the past and its influence on the present; that a science or mathematics text should teach science or mathematics. Actually, in today's world, all of this takes a backseat to social and political concerns. The books now are expected to teach self-esteem, to present role models, to raise consciousness about various issues, and to show society as it ought to be. This is a tall order indeed. Usually in a democratic society, one pursues social and political change by becoming a part of the political process, by running for office and voting for candidates, by promoting legislation, or by managing a private enterprise. In the topsy-turvy world of educational publishing, advocates for social change have set their sights on controlling reality by changing the way in which it is presented in textbooks.

Consider the *Multicultural Guidelines* published by Scott Foresman-Addison Wesley.<sup>1</sup> Scott Foresman has long experience in the business of writing bias guidelines. In 1972, it published *Guidelines for Improving the Image of Women in Textbooks*. In 1990, it created a "multicultural

steering committee" to ensure that the company's editorial products toed that line.

The Scott Foresman-Addison Wesley (SF-AW) bias guidelines comprise 161 pages, longer than most of their counterparts. They lay out a consistent party line for editors, authors, and illustrators. Combining a tone of idealism and authoritarianism, they impose a strict code of political and social correctness. They call for sweeping social and pedagogical changes.

The SF-AW document envisions the creation of a new society composed of "multicultural persons." These are people who look at others and see not an individual but a person who represents a group; the multicultural person understands that people from each group have distinctive ways of thinking, acting, and believing. Ordinarily, in the world of bias guidelines, the identification of the individual with the characteristics of a group is considered stereotyping. Scott Foresman-Addison Wesley overlooks this inconsistency.

The document is an extended celebration of multiculturalism. It is not about so limited a goal as reducing prejudice and promoting understanding among children from different groups. Multicultural education, it says, is not only about changing the content of textbooks and the attitudes of teachers and students, but about demanding specific pedagogical approaches, such as hands-on projects, self-esteem building, collaborative learning, constructivism, multiple intelligences, and an extensive catalog of other innovations. There is nothing wrong with any of these methods, and no doubt good teachers use some or all of them. But it is inappropriate for a publishing company to tell teachers who prefer other classroom methods that they may be guilty of racial, ethnic, and gender bias.

The SF-AW guidelines require that the company's products must each contain "a fair and balanced representation" of people from various cultural groups, racial groups, ethnic groups, and religious groups; males and females; older people; and people with disabilities. Not only the characters in the books, but those portrayed in illustrations must be balanced by race, ethnicity, and gender. Authors too must be selected by their gender and race.

The guidelines say that text illustrations must include people of all physical types, all ages, a mix of tall and short, heavy and thin, including people with disabilities. Although not all groups must be equally

represented in every illustration, each book must have a full balance by race, gender, ethnicity, age, and disability. Illustrations must include all varieties of family units, including a family headed by two parents, by one parent, by grandparents, by aunts/uncles, by older siblings, and by other adults. Illustrators must pay close attention to such matters as "skin tones, hair colors and textures, eye colors, and facial features." Portrayals of diverse members of a multicultural society must be positive and uplifting so that students get a "sense of pride and self-worth." The guidelines include forty pages of photographs of children from different racial and ethnic groups so that illustrators will know what an African American boy, a Filipino girl, a Latin American boy, or a European American girl of eight to twelve looks like.

The guidelines admonish writers about what they must not say. It is objectionable, writers are warned, to write "Primitive cultures sometimes lack adequate medical care," because there are no "primitive cultures." One must not say, "Most Vietnamese are poor peasants," because such a statement, even if true, is condescending. One must not say, "Mr. Vargas, an agricultural adviser, is part of a life-and-death struggle to bring black Africa into the twentieth century." Such a statement is biased because black Africa was already in the twentieth century, even if the author intended to say that its agricultural practices were not. It is objectionable for an author to refer to anyone's language as a *dialect*; to refer to African *tribes* rather than African *ethnic groups*; or to refer to African *huts* (the dwellings in rural Africa must be described as *little houses*).

The language code tells how to describe the members of various American Indian groups; they must be identified as specific "nations," such as Shoshone, Ojibwa, or Choctaw, rather than by the generic term *American Indian* or *Native American*. Authors must ask the representatives of the group itself what name they prefer, rather than relying on historical accounts (writers should refer to *Kakota*, *Dakota*, or *Nakota*, not *Sioux*; to *Tobono O'odham*, not *Papago*; to *Diné Nation*, not *Navajo*). Some American Indian groups use the word *nation*; some use the word *tribe*. The members of the groups themselves should decide what identity they favor (the guidelines do not say how a writer is supposed to find out what the members of the group want to be called or whether they agree). Textbooks are expected to show the positive impact of American Indian groups (tribes? nations?) on American history. For example, the guidelines tell authors to acknowledge the

highly dubious notion that the Constitution of the United States of America was "patterned partially after the League of Five Nations—a union formed by five Iroquois nations." The fact that this debt is not mentioned in the well-documented constitutional debates is of no concern. Textbook authors are expected to promulgate ideas that appeal to ethnic pride, even at the risk of endorsing spurious history. Authors are told to ask "American Indian experts" for their choice of role models rather than focusing on familiar figures like Sacagawea, who helped European Americans (the point is to exclude her precisely because she is known for helping European American explorers). The word *Esquimo* is out, to be replaced by *native Alaskan groups* or specific names such as *Inupiat* and *Yupik*. Writers must be neutral in describing conflicts between the U.S. government and American Indians; they may not describe a victory for the U.S. cavalry as a *battle* and a victory for American Indians as a *massacre*.

In its section on Asian Americans, the guidelines advise writers not to use that term but to refer to the specific nation of origin (*Chinese American*, *Vietnamese American*, and so on). In describing Asian Americans, the word *Oriental* is prohibited as "Eurocentric," as are such words as *distrustful*, *exotic*, *frugal*, *inscrutable*, *mysterious*, *passive*, *rigid*, *sneaky*, *studious*, *submissive*, and *unathletic*. Textbook writers must not refer to the academic success of Asian Americans as "studious" because it would imply a stereotype of Asian Americans as "studious" or as a "model minority."

Although the SF-AW document emphasizes the importance of racial and ethnic pride, it suggests that children of European Americans, it says, have received too much credit for achievements that really belonged to other cultures. Pasta did not originate in Italy, but in Asia, where Marco Polo learned about it; this is surely a controversy that not many people knew about or worried about. During the Middle Ages, Scott Foresman-Addison Wesley's guidelines say, European medicine was based on superstition, while Muslim physicians practiced real medicine. European Americans, it seems, are the only group that must be taken down a few pegs; their self-esteem is too high.

The SF-AW guidelines on "ageism" tell writers what they may and may not say about people over the age of sixty-five. They must be fully represented in text and illustrations; there must be a larger number of older women than older men, because 55 percent of older persons are

women. The activities of older people are divided into "portrayals we limit" and "acceptable portrayals." Those that are limited are older people "baking, knitting, making crafts, whittling, engaging in inactive sports, reminiscing, rocking in chairs." The portrayals that are acceptable include "gardening, shopping, dancing, attending movies and cultural events, engaging in active sports . . ." The following clothing is unacceptable: aprons, canes, rockers, orthopedic shoes, outdated clothing and hats, walkers, and wheelchairs. Terms like *golden ager* and *senior citizen* are banned, as are *biddy*, *busybody*, *codger*, *crone*, *duffer*, *geezer*, *old lady*, *old maid*, *old man*, *past one's prime*, *senile*, and *spinster*. Older people may not be described as *bent*, *dowdy*, *feeble*, *frail*, *bobbling*, *shuffling*, *white-haired*, or *wrinkled*. Nor is it permitted to refer to an older person as *cute*, *dear*, *docile*, *mild-mannered*, *sweet*, or *well-meaning*, all of these being stereotypes. Nor can a writer say that an older person is *bitter*, *cantankerous*, *crabby*, *cranky*, *eccentric*, *forgetful*, *grumpy*, *meek*, *nagging*, *selfish*, *silly*, or *stubborn*. And it is a stereotype to describe a person over sixty-five as *bored*, *dependent*, *inactive*, *isolated*, *lonely*, *poor*, *sick*, *unhappy*, *weak*, or *wearry*. Any description of older people that suggests that they act old is to be treated as a stereotype. The wise writer, reading these guidelines, will portray older persons only as healthy, happy, and able to run a marathon.

The section on gender, as one might expect, prescribes an elaborate code of language and representation. Women must be portrayed in equal numbers with men in all texts and illustrations. The following are typical female stereotypes: passive, frightened, weak, gentle, illogical, indecisive, neat, short, dependent, follower, emotional, and warm. Typical male stereotypes are: active, brave, strong, rough, competitive, logical, decisive, messy, tall, leader, unemotional, and confident. Any reference to gender-specific pronouns (*he*, *she*, *his*, *her*) must be replaced by a plural subject (the writer should say, "all students must read their books," never "each student must read his book"). Words that include the prefix or suffix *man* or *men* must be excluded; such words as *manpower*, *chairman*, *forefathers*, *freshman*, *businessmen*, and *mankind* are banned. (The word *humanity* is acceptable even though it has those horrible three letters [*man*] in its midsection.) Banished too are such words as *gal*, *lady*, *tomboy*, *bussy*, and *sissy*. Writers must never say that "women were granted the right to vote in 1920," but must say instead "women won the vote in 1920," because the

first statement implies that men had power over women (which, of course, they did, since everyone in the U.S. Congress at the time was male).

The SF-AW document insists that all educational materials have a fair and balanced representation of people with disabilities. They must be shown with devices such as walkers, crutches, canes, wheelchairs, and braces. Writers may not refer to *the disabled*, but must say instead *people with disabilities*. Nor can they say *the blind*, or *the deaf*, or *birth defects*; they must instead refer to *people who are blind*, *people who are deaf*, and *people with congenital disabilities*. Words such as *abnormal*, *crazy*, *creature*, *defective*, *deformed*, *freak*, *gimp*, *idiot*, and *retard* are banned. Writers must not use terms such as *lame*; they must say instead *walks with a cane*. They must not write that someone is *confined to a wheelchair*; they must say instead that the person is a *wheelchair user*. They must not refer to someone as a *midget* or *dwarf* or *little person*; they must instead describe a *person of small stature*. Also objectionable are the terms *special*, *physically challenged*, and *differently abled*; these must be replaced by *person who has a disability*. It is equally unacceptable to refer to someone as *normal* or *able-bodied* or *whole*; such people are instead to be called a *person without disabilities* or a *person who is nondisabled*.

The textbooks, say the guidelines, must treat religion in a nonjudgmental way, as a "natural part of people's lives." Writers must show a broad diversity of religious beliefs and practices, not just one or two religions that are well known to students. Any reference to religion must be reviewed by "representatives from various religious groups," thus assuring that nothing will be published that offends any such group. There must be no "adversarial or unfavorable comparisons among religious beliefs," thus assuring that all references to religion in history and in contemporary society will be positive. In portraying religion, "no religious practice or belief is characterized as strange or peculiar, or as sophisticated or primitive." Presumably even the practice of human sacrifice would not be considered strange or peculiar in the neutral, nonjudgmental eyes of the publisher. Certain words associated with religion are banished, such as *cult*, *sect*, *dogma*, *fanatic*, *extremist*, *pagan*, and *heathen*. The term *myth* is to apply only to Greek and Roman traditional stories; religious stories must be called *narratives* rather than *myths*.

Parents might suppose that the most important aspect of schooling is the quality of teaching and learning, that is, its effectiveness in teaching English, mathematics, science, history, and a foreign language. The SF-AW document, however, asserts that the ultimate goal of the academic curriculum is to advance multiculturalism. The literature curriculum, for example, must focus on the racial and ethnic identity of authors. Editors are warned to avoid literature with "an older copyright" because of its racism and sexism; when such selections are included, teachers must emphasize their problematic content, not the author's literary purposes. In mathematics, what matters most is not whether textbooks effectively teach mathematics, but whether they incorporate multicultural themes and biographies into the math curriculum. In science, textbooks must emphasize science in ancient cultures and point out the scientific contributions that Europeans falsely claimed as their own. There is no recognition that scientific principles are the same in every culture, regardless of "who did it first."

Pity the poor textbook writers who must meet all of these mandates and prohibitions. Imagine the challenge as she or he sits down with a list of forbidden words and phrases and tries to explain American history or write a story for fifth-grade students that includes males and females, families with one or two parents or no parents, people with disabilities, older people who are jogging, a broad array of racial and ethnic groups, and people of different heights and different weights.

In the 1980s, other publishers adopted similar requirements for their editors, authors, and illustrators. Contributors to textbooks either complied or found different work. In 1990, the *New York Times* described an author and an illustrator who couldn't take the shifting mandates anymore. The writer explained, "Maybe it was the messenger at the door with another set of guidelines, updating the set she had received from the publisher a few days before. Maybe it was the elaborate recipes for an ethnic and racial mix in the cast of characters." The article quoted an artist who stopped accepting textbook assignments in 1986 after receiving the latest instructions from the publisher for an illustration:

It's etched in acid in my mind. They sent 10 pages of single-spaced specifications. The hero was a Hispanic boy. There were black twins, one boy, one girl; an overweight

Oriental boy; and an American Indian girl. That leaves the Caucasian. Since we mustn't forget the physically handicapped, she was born with a congenital malformation and only had three fingers on one hand.

One child had to have an Irish setter, and the setter was to be female. . . . They also had a senior citizen, and I had to show her jogging.

I can't do it anymore.<sup>2</sup>

Probably the most influential bias guidelines, which are widely copied and cited by others in the industry, are those published by McGraw-Hill. This company has been publishing bias guidelines for its textbooks and tests since 1968. Its most recent guidelines, published in 1993, are titled *Reflecting Diversity: Multicultural Guidelines for Educational Publishing Professionals*.<sup>3</sup> Prepared by a staff of twenty-eight, along with sixty-three consultants, the MH guidelines are shorter than the SF-AW document but far more specific in listing the words, phrases, and images to be avoided.

The following words and phrases are deemed sexist and may not be used in materials published by McGraw-Hill:

Girls (when talking about females over the age of sixteen)

Sissy

Tomboy

You're smart as a man, as strong as a man

Bitch (this word may not be used for a female dog)

Girls are sugar and spice and everything nice

That was a manly act of courage

He took it like a man

Man the sailboats

Henpecked husband

She acted like a man

Lady

One-man band

Coed

Fireman (or any other occupation that includes the suffix *man*)

Manpower

women. The activities of older people are divided into "portrayals we limit" and "acceptable portrayals." Those that are limited are older people "baking, knitting, making crafts, whittling, engaging in inactive sports, reminiscing, rocking in chairs." The portrayals that are acceptable include "gardening, shopping, dancing, attending movies and cultural events, engaging in active sports . . ." The following clothing is unacceptable: aprons, canes, rockers, orthopedic shoes, outdated clothing and hats, walkers, and wheelchairs. Terms like *golden ager* and *senior citizen* are banned, as are *biddy*, *busybody*, *codger*, *crone*, *duffer*, *geezer*, *old lady*, *old maid*, *old man*, *past one's prime*, *senile*, and *spinster*. Older people may not be described as *bent*, *dowdy*, *feeble*, *frail*, *bobbling*, *shuffling*, *white-haired*, or *wrinkled*. Nor is it permitted to refer to an older person as *cute*, *dear*, *docile*, *mild-mannered*, *sweet*, or *well-meaning*, all of these being stereotypes. Nor can a writer say that an older person is *bitter*, *cantankerous*, *crabby*, *cranky*, *eccentric*, *forgetful*, *grumpy*, *meek*, *nagging*, *selfish*, *silly*, or *stubborn*. And it is a stereotype to describe a person over sixty-five as *bored*, *dependent*, *inactive*, *isolated*, *lonely*, *poor*, *sick*, *unhappy*, *weak*, or *wearry*. Any description of older people that suggests that they act old is to be treated as a stereotype. The wise writer, reading these guidelines, will portray older persons only as healthy, happy, and able to run a marathon.

The section on gender, as one might expect, prescribes an elaborate code of language and representation. Women must be portrayed in equal numbers with men in all texts and illustrations. The following are typical female stereotypes: passive, frightened, weak, gentle, illogical, indecisive, neat, short, dependent, follower, emotional, and warm. Typical male stereotypes are: active, brave, strong, rough, competitive, logical, decisive, messy, tall, leader, unemotional, and confident. Any reference to gender-specific pronouns (*he*, *she*, *his*, *her*) must be replaced by a plural subject (the writer should say, "all students must read their books," never "each student must read his book"). Words that include the prefix or suffix *man* or *men* must be excluded; such words as *manpower*, *chairman*, *forefathers*, *freshman*, *businessmen*, and *mankind* are banned. (The word *humanity* is acceptable even though it has those horrible three letters [*man*] in its midsection.) Banned too are such words as *gal*, *lady*, *tomboy*, *bussy*, and *sissy*. Writers must never say that "women were granted the right to vote in 1920," but must say instead "women won the vote in 1920," because the

first statement implies that men had power over women (which, of course, they did, since everyone in the U.S. Congress at the time was male).

The SF-AW document insists that all educational materials have a fair and balanced representation of people with disabilities. They must be shown with devices such as walkers, crutches, canes, wheelchairs, and braces. Writers may not refer to *the disabled*, but must say instead *people with disabilities*. Nor can they say *the blind*, or *the deaf*, or *birth defects*; they must instead refer to *people who are blind*, *people who are deaf*, and *people with congenital disabilities*. Words such as *abnormal*, *crazy*, *creature*, *defective*, *deformed*, *freak*, *gimp*, *idiot*, and *retard* are banned. Writers must not use terms such as *lame*; they must say instead *walks with a cane*. They must not write that someone is *confined to a wheelchair*; they must say instead that the person is a *wheelchair user*. They must not refer to someone as a *midget* or *dwarf* or *little person*; they must instead describe a *person of small stature*. Also objectionable are the terms *special*, *physically challenged*, and *differently abled*; these must be replaced by *person who has a disability*. It is equally unacceptable to refer to someone as *normal* or *able-bodied* or *whole*; such people are instead to be called a *person without disabilities* or a *person who is nondisabled*.

The textbooks, say the guidelines, must treat religion in a nonjudgmental way, as a "natural part of people's lives." Writers must show a broad diversity of religious beliefs and practices, not just one or two religions that are well known to students. Any reference to religion must be reviewed by "representatives from various religious groups," thus assuring that nothing will be published that offends any such group. There must be no "adversarial or unfavorable comparisons among religious beliefs," thus assuring that all references to religion in history and in contemporary society will be positive. In portraying religion, "no religious practice or belief is characterized as strange or peculiar, or as sophisticated or primitive." Presumably even the practice of human sacrifice would not be considered strange or peculiar in the neutral, nonjudgmental eyes of the publisher. Certain words associated with religion are banished, such as *cult*, *sect*, *dogma*, *fanatic*, *extremist*, *pagan*, and *heathen*. The term *myth* is to apply only to Greek and Roman traditional stories; religious stories must be called *narratives* rather than *myths*.



Forefathers  
 Brotherhood  
 Man-made  
 Fisherman

It now seems that the "Founding Fathers" must become the "Founding Precursors," or simply "the Founders," ignoring the fact that all of them were men. Presumably one cannot sing "America the Beautiful" (written by a woman, Katherine Lee Bates) without changing the line "And crown thy good with brotherhood/from sea to shining sea," to "And crown thy good with community/from sea to shining sea." It is anyone's guess what to do about the sexism in the line "God shed His grace on thee." (God shed Its grace on thee? God shed Her grace on thee? Gods shed Their grace on thee? God shed the grace on thee?)

Those who write for McGraw-Hill publications may no longer refer to mankind, the rise of man, great men in history, man's achievements, or Cro-Magnon man. Such sexist language must be replaced by terms like *human beings*, *people*, *humanity*, *figures*, *personalities*, and *Cro-Magnon people*. All individual personal pronouns, whether *he* or *she*, *his* or *her*, must disappear forever. Animals must be referred to as *it*, not *he* or *she*, and writers must no longer describe a country or a boat as *she* (e.g., "England ruled the seas. Her navy was huge" is no longer permitted).

Illustrators for McGraw-Hill must maintain a 50-50 balance between the sexes in their art, with equal distribution of active and significant roles between them. When illustrators show historical events where women were not full participants, they must include a caption that calls attention to this inequity; for example, a picture of men lined up to vote in the nineteenth century would be accompanied by a caption that said: "The right to participate in the electoral process was restricted to men until the success of the women's suffrage movement in 1920." Presumably a portrait of General George Washington crossing the Delaware River would have a caption pointing out that women were excluded from important roles in the military until the late twentieth century.

The guidelines provide illustrators with a list of sex-stereotyped images, along with alternatives:

Women always wearing aprons must be replaced by males and/or females wearing aprons.  
 Mother sewing while father reads must be replaced by mother working at her desk while father reads or clears the dining room table.  
 Mother bringing sandwiches to father as he fixes the roof must be replaced by mother fixing the roof.  
 Mother doing household chores must be replaced by father doing household chores.  
 Mother seeing father off to work must be replaced by mother leaving for work with her briefcase or tools.  
 Mother doing the shopping must be replaced by father doing the shopping.  
 Mother showing shock or fear must be replaced by both father and mother expressing the same facial emotions.  
 Father looking calm in trying circumstances must be replaced by mother looking calm in trying circumstances.  
 Females backing away from action fearfully (e.g., "girl recoiling from snake, boy peering down curiously at it") must be replaced by "both sexes close to the snake, with perhaps a girl reaching toward it."  
 Boys playing ball, girls watching, must be replaced by coed teams, boys watching.  
 Females acting emotional, flirtatious, and coy must be replaced by both sexes acting the same way.  
 Girls looking neat and wearing dresses must be replaced by girls wearing jeans or shorts and being active, perhaps sporting "dirt splashes."  
 Girls preoccupied with their appearance, playing dress-up, and buying clothes must be replaced by both sexes equally vain, equally concerned about their appearance, with both parents using blow-driers and cologne, and with teenage boys cultivating their beards.  
 Pink for girls and blue for boys is out; both colors must be used together on baby cribs and carriages.  
 Girls playing with dolls and baby carriages must be replaced by both girls and boys playing with the same objects, tools, books, fishing rods, and dolls.

In preparing art that portrays the role of women in history, illustrators must search for photos and images that show women taking a leading role and must be on the watch for the following stereotyped images:

- Pioneer women doing domestic chores must be replaced by pioneer women chopping wood, using a plow, using firearms, and handling large animals.
- Pioneer woman riding in a covered wagon as man walks must be replaced by both man and woman walking or both riding, or woman walking while man rides.
- Women as passengers on a sailboat must be replaced by women hoisting the sails on a boat.
- Women depicted as nurses, elementary school teachers, clerks, secretaries, tellers, and librarians must be replaced by women as doctors, professors, managers, police officers, sports figures, and construction workers, and by men as nurses, secretaries, and elementary school teachers.

Some of these replacements require writers and artists to tell lies about history. Until the latter decades of the twentieth century, most women who worked were in fact nurses, teachers, and secretaries; not many women were doctors, professors, managers, police officers, sports figures, and construction workers. To pretend otherwise is to falsify the past. It minimizes the barriers that women faced. It pretends that the gender equality of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries was a customary condition in the past.

The MH guidelines express barely concealed rage against people of European ancestry. They deride European Americans for exploiting slaves, migrant workers, and factory labor; they excoriate the land rapacity of the pioneers and mock their so-called courage in fighting Native Americans: "Bigots and bigotry," say the guidelines, referring to European Americans, "must be identified and discussed." European Americans, the guidelines suggest, were uniquely responsible for bigotry and exploitation in all human history. Like the SF-AW guidelines, McGraw-Hill's advise writers to recognize that "the very foundation that our country is built upon is modeled in part after tenets of the Iron-quois Confederacy," which is intended to raise Native American self-esteem and bring the European Americans down a few notches.

Writers for McGraw-Hill are warned that if they pay too much attention to figures like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Harriet Tubman, George Washington Carver, Booker T. Washington, and Jackie Robinson, it is only because they are "acceptable to the European-American establishment." The guidelines recommend in-depth discussion of figures such as Paul Robeson, Carter G. Woodson, Paul Dunbar, Nat Turner, Angela Davis, and Jesse Jackson, "who are considered controversial by some." This may have once seemed like a radical proposal, but all or most of these figures have received respectful notice in the media and even in textbooks. Woodson was a historian of the black experience in America; Dunbar was a poet who is now frequently anthologized; Robeson and Davis were known for their far-left politics; Nat Turner led a slave revolt; and Jesse Jackson is a well-known activist.

The illustrations in McGraw-Hill's publications must be balanced by race, gender, and disability. The illustrator must take care to avoid a long list of racial stereotypes. When portraying African Americans, the following are considered stereotypes: African Americans who have white features or all look alike; African Americans all having the same skin color; African Americans with the same hairstyles; African Americans with exaggerated African American features. In showing the dress of African Americans, illustrators must avoid showing African Americans wearing loud colors, straw hats, white suits, and exaggerated prints, or, conversely, middle-class clothes. When showing the environment in which African Americans live, they must avoid depicting urban African Americans in crowded tenements on chaotic streets, big bright cars, and abandoned buildings with broken windows and wash hanging out, and they must also avoid showing them in "dull, white picket-fence neighborhoods."

When portraying Native Americans, illustrators must avoid the stereotyped image of long hair, braids, and headbands; they must not depict red skin, impassive expressions, "how" gestures, warlike stances, and comic poses. They must also avoid full headdress, feathers, buffalo robes, war paint, and bows and arrows. Native Americans must not be shown living in teepees surrounded by totem poles and pinto horses or living in shacks or on reservations. Males should not appear hunting or in war parties or passing the peace pipe. Females should not be shown sewing buffalo hides, grinding corn, or carrying papooses. Contemporary Native Americans should not be working on ranches

or in menial jobs or in skyscraper construction (they should be lawyers, teachers, sports figures, and professionals). Again, the world may not be depicted as it is and as it was, but only as the guideline writers would like it to be.

Other publishing houses have bias guidelines that are not as detailed as those from Scott Foresman–Addison Wesley and McGraw–Hill. Harcourt's are only a few pages; they have not been released for public review. When I first tried to get a copy of the document, I was told that it was confidential; a friend obtained a copy and sent it to me. It is hard to see why the publishing company is so secretive. It echoes the guidelines of Scott Foresman–Addison Wesley and McGraw–Hill regarding nonsexist language, stereotypes, and balanced portrayal of people of all genders and racial and ethnic groups. But there are a few innovations. One is that textbook writers must "beware of geographical chauvinism in the use of the terms America and Americans," since they refer to North, South, and Central America. Be specific, the writer is warned, because "there is no place simply called America." Harcourt also advises writers to be wary of the geographic terms *Oriental*, *Oriental*, *the Middle East*, *Eastern*, *Western*, *East*, *West*. The Harcourt guidelines say "some people consider these terms offensive because they are based on a colonial view of the world as being centered in Europe." Writers should use *Southeast Asia* instead of *Middle East* when referring to geography. The words *Orient* and *Oriental* are absolutely banned.<sup>4</sup>

My efforts to obtain guidelines from Houghton Mifflin were at first unavailing. However, I did unearth a current statement from the publisher saying that the contents of its literature textbooks are based on the most recent Census Bureau statistics. For example, a reading book with twenty-two selections would include three pieces by African American writers, three by Latinos, two by Asian Americans, one by a Native American, and one by a writer with a physical disability.

I eventually discovered Houghton Mifflin guidelines from 1981, called *Eliminating Stereotypes*.<sup>5</sup> These turned out to be a "mother lode" of bias guidelines, if one may be permitted a possibly sexist expression. I don't know if Houghton Mifflin still uses them, since no one there would tell me, but they continue to be cited by other publishers (River-side, for example, used this 1981 document when writing test items for the VNT). Here in forty-two succinct pages is an extensive listing of what writers are allowed to say and what they must not say. Here are

the forbidden words and phrases related to gender bias and stereotyping. Editors are advised to base their selections and illustrations on the latest census figures for black Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, disabled Americans, and older Americans (and to remember that the ratio of older women to older men is precisely 100 to 69). Writers are reminded to portray both sexes in the same professions and the same activities, exhibiting the same emotions. They must depict members of both sexes as "tall/short, plump/slender, right-handed/left-handed, light-haired/dark-haired/gray-haired, short-haired/long-haired, brown-eyed/blue-eyed/green-eyed, etc., having freckles/not having freckles, with/without hearing aids or eyeglasses." Nor should they forget to represent men with and without mustaches and beards, and men who are bald. Writers and illustrators are told to show minorities "in stories traditionally lacking ethnic characters," such as "royalty and members of court," and "townspeople in fairy tales." In writing about "disabled persons," Houghton Mifflin contributors must not portray them as "sinister characters" such as pirates, witches, or criminals because it is wrong to associate "evil with disabilities." (No more Captain Hook!) Like Harcourt, Houghton Mifflin advises its writers to avoid the words "America" and "American" and to substitute "the United States" and "a citizen of the United States." (The guidelines themselves repeatedly use the word "American" to refer to people who live in the United States.)

In 2001, Houghton Mifflin added new criteria for selecting multicultural literature (this document is unpublished).<sup>6</sup> When choosing stories about African Americans, editors must avoid or limit those that are about slavery or the Underground Railroad; that contain dialect; that depict African Americans as athletes, musicians, or entertainers; that are about controversial people like Malcolm X; and that are about civil rights. When choosing stories about Asian Americans, editors must avoid those that "perpetuate the 'model minority' myth, i.e., musical prodigy, class valedictorian, etc." When choosing stories about Latinos, they must limit those that feature migrant workers and avoid those that are about illegal immigration and religious holidays. Editors are directed to seek out selections by authors who are of the same ethnic group that they are describing.

The 2001 Houghton Mifflin literature guidelines identify certain children's books that must be avoided, possibly because the author was not of the same ethnic group as the main characters in the book. Some

of the prohibited books have received prestigious awards, including Mary Hoffman's *Amazing Grace*, Theodore Taylor's *The Cay*, Paula Fox's *Slave Dancer*, and William Armstrong's *Sounder*. Ellen Levine's *Hate English!*, about an Asian girl learning English, was excluded because the girl required the intervention of her Caucasian teacher to solve her problems, which was apparently offensive to the bias review panel.

So what should one make of all this mandating and prohibiting and avoiding? Is it a good thing that words like *policeman* and *fireman* are not used in our schools? Should schools change Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* to "Death of a Sales Representative"? Should Willy Loman trade places with his wife and send her out on the road? Should we stop reading *A Man for All Seasons* or should we convert it to "A Person for All Seasons"? Will schoolchildren never again learn about "The Man Without a Country"? What of George Bernard Shaw's "Person and Superperson," formerly known as *Man and Superman*? And what should be done about Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land*?

The bias guidelines are censorship guidelines. Nothing more, nothing less. This language censorship and thought control should be repugnant to those who care about freedom of expression. Clearly there must be some commonsense limitations on what people—especially schoolchildren—see and hear. We don't introduce graphic images of carnage into our textbooks or into daily newspapers. In the days after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, few newspapers published photographs of people leaping to their death from the highest floors of the two buildings. Few publish photographs of mutilated bodies from crime or battle scenes. Most newspapers do not include printed materials or photographs that are obviously pornographic. Journalists and editors acknowledge implicitly the importance of good taste, judgment, and appropriateness when selecting materials, without laws and regulations to define what cannot be published.

Unfortunately, the textbook publishers have surrendered control of their products to the language police. Browbeaten and intimidated by zealous advocates of censorship, they have accepted self-censorship. They have abandoned the idea that their editors and authors might exercise common sense and discretion. The linguistic and ideological conformity that has been imposed on the American educational pub-

lishing industry is an outrage. It insults the dignity and integrity of those who work in publishing. It destroys the possibility of freedom of thought and expression. It creates a formula to which every writer must adhere, or risk rejection and failure.

The guidelines, when faithfully applied, guarantee the exclusion of imaginative literature from our textbooks. They actively prohibit the transmission of our national culture, whose imaginative literature was not written in conformity with the publishers' language codes. They assume that everything that was not written in accordance with their mandates must be racist, sexist, ageist, and harmful to any group that has ever known oppression or exclusion. Is it any wonder that students who read such pap do not enjoy reading, and that they see little connection between art and life? The guidelines discredit the educational mission of the school in the eyes of the young.

Writers of children's literature, like writers of literature for any audience, must be able to write without fear of the censor, without fear that noses will be counted and sorted according to their race, gender, disability, age, and ethnicity. Historians, like writers of fiction, must be able to write what they know, based on evidence and scholarship, without fear of the censor and without deference to political, religious, ethnic, or gender sensitivities.

The very existence of guidelines that limit the words and ideas that may be expressed is offensive. Our nation prides itself on the principle of freedom of speech contained in the First Amendment to our Constitution. It is the cornerstone of our Bill of Rights. Yet the practice of censorship, almost unknown to the general public, has been widely accepted for many years within the educational publishing industry as the normal way of doing business.