

Teacher Voices in Writing World History Standards: Hard Lessons from Texas

In Texas, not unlike other states, teachers are at the center of writing and revising world history standards. The adoption of those standards in Texas depends on the majority of the fifteen-member, popularly elected State Board of Education (SBOE), which is ultimately responsible for writing the standards.¹ Texas law directs the SBOE to review the guidelines for K-12 education approximately every ten years, and teachers, primarily, fill the workgroups, that review and revise the guidelines. This was the case in 1998 when the first world history TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) were drafted, again during a significant revision in 2010, a streamlining process in 2018, and a full review in 2022. Consequently, among the voices that shape the TEKS, teachers play a significant role, yet their expertise can be overruled by as little as a one-vote majority of state board members who often lack a background in social studies specifically or public education generally. This contrast between teachers and board members animates the most heated debates over the TEKS. In the hands of educators, world history standards in the TEKS tend to move two steps forward toward a more global perspective; in the hands of board members, those standards tend to move a step backward towards a more parochial point of view.

This case study about writing and revising standards in Texas argues that despite a democratic and transparent process, intervention by SBOE members diminishes world history standards written by teacher work groups. This argument leads to three larger points about world history standards: 1) amid the voices that shape world history standards, teachers with content and pedagogical expertise make the most significant contributions; 2) debates about world history standards extend beyond content and pedagogy into the American culture war arena where guidelines shaped by content expertise are challenged by strong sentiments related to American exceptionalism and religious ideology; and 3) by documenting the standards revision and writing process, we are reminded that state standards for world history are often a problematic compromise that should be approached by curriculum developers, teachers, and those

of us who train teachers with the skepticism and analytical skills that practicing history imparts to us.

World History Voices

During the 2010 revision, the SBOE created a furious public uproar over the goal of history education in the United States. Board members with a historical sensibility shaped by American exceptionalism, Western civilization, and Christian Americanism won the day. Since 2010, the SBOE has revisited the social studies TEKS twice with an eye toward revisions, including draft proposals that would emphasize world history in grades three through five. It is timely, then, to analyze the process that Texans follow to develop social studies standards, especially against the backdrop of the 2010 revision that garnered extensive media coverage, a documentary film titled *The Revisionaries*, and more than a few articles by scholars. True, the United States history standards attracted the lion's share of attention, but world history drew significant commentary as well. Since the revision process in 2010, analysis of the world history TEKS has indicated a Eurocentric bias, prevalent Islamophobia, and cheerleading for free enterprise in an overstuffed set of expectations for teachers. To address these issues, especially the request of K-12 teachers to make the scope of the curriculum more manageable, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) organized a broadly inclusive effort to "streamline" the TEKS in 2018. This revision process, like the one before it in 2010, and the most recent review in 2022, follow the same pattern of participation: teachers who provide input through surveys and focus groups; a handful of SBOE-appointed content advisors (in 2010 and 2022);² TEA-organized educator work groups who write drafts of the TEKS; citizens who speak before the SBOE at public hearings; and board members who accept, reject, debate, and revise work group drafts. Not unexpectedly, the charged atmosphere around teaching history in Texas attracts media coverage while the final language of the TEKS and the textbooks they influence are analyzed in academic articles. All these voices contribute to shaping world history education in Texas.

A close look at the 2018 revisions demonstrates that as the process of approving standards drew closer to final adoption by the SBOE, the further the TEKS drifted from the expert recommendations written by work groups of world history educators. This was also the case in 2010. In 2022, a 10-4 SBOE majority rejected draft guidelines that significantly enhanced world history content in elementary grades.³ We can chart the fate of world history standards by analyzing the different voices that shape the TEKS: 1) academics who voiced concerns in scholarly articles and textbook reviews; 2) hundreds of teachers, who, through surveys and work groups wrote revisions to improve the TEKS; 3) concerned citizens who spoke before the SBOE during opportunities for public testimony; and 4) the fifteen members of the State Board of Education.

The result of the 2018 streamlining process shows that writing history curriculum guidelines remains an uneven practice in Texas where, despite the best intentions of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to create and shepherd an inclusive process, the impact of individual board members on the guidelines remains profound. Although popularly elected as a board to make broad policy for K-12 education, in the area of curriculum guidelines a few board members claim for themselves a kind of executive privilege to make decisions based on their own idiosyncratic historical sensibilities rather than on the open, transparent, and consensus-building context that produced the data and TEKS drafts that came before them. As the board members engaged in the final meetings that determined the language of the streamlined TEKS in 2018, they rarely referenced recommendations based on the deep and broad expertise of teacher work groups. Rather, when explaining amendments to the TEKS, board members often referenced individual public speakers and argued based on anecdotes and feelings rather than on a professional understanding of writing curriculum standards or of world history methods. As a result, at the stickiest moments, best practices in world history and the recommendations of the teacher work groups seemed furthest from the rationale for revisions. That said, the Board accepted the majority of recommendations from the world history work groups without debate - two steps forward; yet they stumbled over fixations on the Arab-Israeli conflict and terrorism by Islamic extremists - one step back.

Voice 1: The Academics

The TEKS revision process in 2010 produced a flurry of media commentary, with analysis by academics not far behind. I contributed “A Missed Opportunity for World History in Texas” to Keith Erikson’s edited volume on the struggles over history standards in Texas. I found that the “Western civ plus” guidelines for the Texas world history course were the result of a variety of factors: “Texas education law, the sentimental appeal of American exceptionalism, lack of world history specialists among expert reviewers, and the Western-centered, ahistorical frame of reference among board members.”⁴

Social studies educator Thomas W. Barker characterizes the world history standards adopted in 2010 as “good, bad, and ugly.” The revised TEKS are better than some state standards, Barker finds. They pay attention to pre-Columbian civilizations, include an expectation that students will learn about the history of women, children and the family, a topic mostly absent from other state guidelines, and depart from strictly political topics to include art and architecture. Yet, among the bad and ugly, Barker emphasizes the problems of a “European driven narrative” in the TEKS and the ahistorical “emphasis on the relationship between democracy and Christianity.”⁵

Religious studies professor Mark A. Chancey was also struck by the linking of democracy and Christianity in the TEKS identified by Barker. A Christian Americanist bloc of state board members, according to Chancey, significantly shaped the TEKS through their appointment of expert reviewers, guidance to writing committees, and amendments to the TEKS by majority vote. Chancey explains that almost half of the board members in 2010 could be characterized as advocates of, or sympathetic to, the Christian Americanist claim that “America was founded to be a Christian nation governed by Bible-based laws, that the country has departed from its roots, and that it should reclaim its Christian heritage.”⁶ That bloc, including two board chairs, succeeded in inserting guidelines based on underlying historical inaccuracy, oversimplified ideas, and logic-defying arguments. Chancey rightly wondered how the guidelines would affect textbooks and whether publishers would be “expected to replicate the arguments that lie behind the creation of particular standards.”⁷ Others were concerned as well.

The Texas Freedom Network (TFN) was particularly concerned about the impact of the board’s ahistorical biases being incorporated into textbook writing. Consequently, TFN’s Education Fund commissioned several scholars to review textbook proposals for Texas students.⁸ In 2014, historian Edward Countryman led a multi-disciplinary team of doctoral students in an analysis of textbooks on Texas, United States, and world history that had been proposed to the SBOE. Not unexpectedly, they find that the textbooks “range enormously in coverage and quality,” but, more important, they attribute the problems identified in the textbooks to the incoherence of the TEKS themselves.⁹ For example, the way “free enterprise” is framed in the world history guidelines, they explain, is “political, ideological, and simplistic, rather than genuinely historical.” Textbook authors, they suggest, would undoubtedly be hard pressed to cover Arab-Israeli relations meaningfully when the TEKS standard “presupposes sole Arab responsibility for what actually is a tangled and seemingly intractable situation.”¹⁰

TFN invited religious studies scholar and Christian theologian David Brockman to review the treatment of world religions in world history textbooks proposed for adoption in Texas. Brockman finds that the textbooks actually do a better job of presenting religions in a world history methodology than would be expected from the flawed TEKS. Nevertheless, Brockman points out, “the TEKS do not encourage balance and accuracy in the coverage of world religions. Instead, they are basically oriented towards western civilization, and they privilege Christianity; they tell a triumphalist and at times historically inaccurate story of the rise of the West, guided by its dominant religion.”¹¹ Brockman went further in 2016 and laid blame squarely at the feet of the Christian Americanist bloc on the board. Imbalance is particularly noticeable, Brockman argues, in how the TEKS and the textbooks based on them handle the history of peaceful and violent means in the expansion of Christianity and Islam. Violence is emphasized in the presentation of Islam and de-emphasized in the history of Christianity.¹²

Whereas Countryman and Brockman reviewed textbook proposals, Middle East historian Tamer Balci analyzed the presentation of Islam in textbooks that the SBOE authorized for use in Texas schools. The textbooks not only contain multiple inaccuracies, Balci finds, but they are clearly influenced by Islamophobic TEKS standards that associate Islam with terrorism and lay blame for Middle East violence on Arabs. Balci's key criticism complements Brockman's point about the unbalanced portrayal of Islamic expansion "by the sword." Balci explains that the texts conflate rapid political expansion through conquest by Arab armies with the much more gradual expansion in the practice of Islam. For example, Balci notes that in 750 CE, only ten percent of the population in the expansive Umayyad caliphate practiced Islam.¹³

From an academic perspective, it was clear that the world history TEKS adopted in 2010 would benefit from another round of revisions. As the ten-year anniversary of the 2010 TEKS approached, teachers, not academics made the most compelling argument for revision: namely, that the world history standards were too extensive to adequately teach in one academic year. Although some issues identified by the academics arose for discussion during the streamlining process, professional scholars had the least discernible impact on revising the TEKS. There is no evidence that their articles were mentioned by the streamlining work groups, members of the SBOE, or the public speakers who appeared before them. None of the academic authors appeared during public testimony to speak about world history in 2018.

Voice 2: The Teachers

Texas teachers were not alone in their concerns about how best to manage the content for a world history course. In 2018 the College Board announced plans to divide the World History Advanced Placement course at 1200 CE and shift the emphasis to the modern era.¹⁴ Rather than eliminate coverage in the world history course from hunter-gatherers to the rise of the Mongols, the TEA recommended a streamlining process with the goal of reducing repetitive, redundant, unclear, and inaccurate material. Since world history instructional materials (e.g., textbooks) had been approved by the SBOE in 2016, the TEA advised the board that streamlining would be more appropriate than a full revision. The SBOE agreed and restricted the streamlining process to removing redundancies and rewriting standards only for the sake of accuracy and clarity, but members reserved for themselves some "latitude" for revisions that would enhance the integrity and longevity of the TEKS.

Surveys

In response to the concerns of social studies teachers in Texas about over-stuffed guidelines, the TEA proposed a multi-step process for streamlining the TEKS to which hundreds of educators and other concerned stake holders could contribute. The process

began with a survey of social studies teachers and publicizing opportunities to take part in the work groups that would provide recommendations to the board. Consequently, from the summer of 2017 to the summer of 2018, through surveys, focus groups, and work groups, teachers provided more data, discussion, and specific recommendations on streamlining the world history standards than any other stakeholders.

In focus groups and surveys, teachers expressed their main concerns about the world history course: “too much content and not enough time . . . some student expectations need clarification . . . some standards are redundant or overlap with each other . . . some content is not essential.” They expressed concern about the Eurocentric emphasis in the TEKS rather than the global point of view that should characterize a world history approach. Additionally, they proposed creating more time to teach world history, making it a two-year course. They recommended thinning out the list of required historical figures and coverage from ca. 3000 BC through 600 AD (N.B. the SBOE narrowly voted down the use of BCE / CE in 2010). A number of the TEKS standards emerged as “hot topics,” about which teachers disagreed on how best to revise.¹⁵ The “hot topics” flagged by teachers are notable for two reasons: 1) they correlate to those discussed by academics; and 2) they were authored by SBOE members in the 2010 revision process, not by the committee of teachers who wrote the draft standards.

Work Groups

In the spirit of creating a democratic and transparent process for revising curriculum guidelines for public education, the work group application process was open to all concerned citizens of Texas. In practice, however, the opportunity was most heavily publicized to K-12 teachers throughout the state, and, consequently, they accounted for all 130 workgroup participants with the exception of six who teach at universities or are affiliated with non-profit organizations like the Texas State Historical Association. The tenth grade World History Studies course was primarily reviewed by a sub-group of nine: one social studies coordinator, two instructional coaches, six teachers, and me--a university professor. I observed that the group members were deeply knowledgeable in world history content and pedagogy based on experiences teaching both regular and AP world history courses.¹⁶ Board members Hardy and Bahorich had previously noted that teachers will know best how to streamline TEKS content. They were right about this group. They delivered thoughtful recommendations based on expertise, experience, vibrant discussion, and consensus.

The Texas guidelines for teaching world history consist of thirty-one “knowledge statements” that are subdivided into more specific, “student expectations,” and organized into eight thematic strands. Instructional materials, like textbooks and classroom curricula, are then built upon these guidelines. The world history work group reviewed the history strand’s fourteen “knowledge statements,” and attendant “student

expectations.” The other thematic strands--geography, economics, government, citizenship, culture, the trio of science, technology, and society, and, social studies skills--were reviewed and revised by separate work groups who tracked continuity in the strands from kindergarten to high school.¹⁷ In sum, almost fifty professionals in social studies education reviewed the entire world history TEKS before recommendations for revision were sent to the SBOE.

The prohibition against substantially rewriting problematic standards (the “hot topics” identified in teacher surveys) diminished the world history work group’s recommendations at some points to no more than advice for a future revision committee. The group flagged fifteen standards for a future revision with recommendations to replace the abbreviations “BC” and “AD” with “BCE” and “CE” change “explain the impact of the fall of Rome on Western Europe” to explain “the collapse of classical civilizations,” and add “clear reference to non-European imperialism.” Although the SBOE retained the privilege to substantially rewrite or add standards, no board members pursued the advice to make changes that went beyond the work group’s streamlining mandate.¹⁸

The world history group made fourteen streamlining recommendations that did not attract undue attention from public commentators or board members who approved them with little or no commentary. Here, the world history guidelines made two steps forward toward a more global world history sensibility. The group noted the redundant and Eurocentric focus on Christianity and successfully shifted the TEKS toward a more global perspective by eliminating repetitive references and revising language. For example, “the spread of Christianity” between 600 and 1450 became “the spread of major religions.” Thus, references to religion, encompassing Christianity, remained in the TEKS, while five redundant additions of terms singling out Christianity in the history strand were removed. More than once the group diminished the Eurocentric bias of the TEKS by replacing “European” with more global-oriented language. For example, the expectation that “the student understands the causes and impact of European expansion from 1450 to 1750” was revised as “the student understands the causes and impact of increased global interaction . . .” The group succeeded at removing some cheerleading language: “explain new economic factors and principles that contributed to the success of Europe’s Commercial Revolution” became simply “explain new economic factors and principles of Europe’s Commercial Revolution.”¹⁹ David Brockman noted the improvements in the world history TEKS, specifically in diminishing the Christian Americanist bias in favor of a more balanced approach to world religions, while lamenting its lingering influence in the standards for United States history.²⁰

The world history group ran aground on the most challenging and controversial standards in the TEKS, 13 F and 14 A and B:

(13) History. The student understands the impact of major events associated with the Cold War and independence movements. The student is expected to:

[A-E]

(F) explain how Arab rejection of the State of Israel has led to ongoing conflict.

(14) History. The student understands the development of radical Islamic fundamentalism and the subsequent use of terrorism by some of its adherents. The student is expected to

(A) summarize the development and impact of radical Islamic fundamentalism on events in the second half of the 20th century, including Palestinian terrorism and the growth of al Qaeda; and

(B) explain the U.S. response to terrorism from September 11, 2001, to the present.

While knowledge statement 13 is appropriate for a world history course, student expectation F is a surprise. This standard was controversial from the moment it was introduced in 2010 by former board member Don McLeroy. He successfully replaced the recommendation drafted by a teacher work group, “explain the origins and impact of the Israeli Palestinian conflict on global politics,” and managed to gather a slim supportive majority over the objections of some board members. This tendentious guideline has been called out by public speakers at SBOE meetings, by scholars writing about the TEKS over the past decade, by social studies teachers surveyed in 2017, by the world history work group in 2018, and was deleted in drafts written by the 2022 world history work group.²¹

The streamlining work group proposed eliminating 13 F and adding the phrase “the creation of the State of Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict” to a list of examples of independence movements and on-going conflicts. This was an unsatisfactory solution that public speakers and board members wrestled with as the process continued in the fall of 2018.

The final knowledge statement and student expectations in the history strand, 14 A and B, were as problematic and notorious as 13 F. They proved so intractable because of the restricted streamlining process that the world history work group could do little more than recommend a full revision of the knowledge statement that would better

capture the multi-faceted world history of the most recent decades. Consequently, in public hearings and board member discussions, 14 A and B caused significant debate.

After providing the SBOE additional rationales for revisions in the summer of 2018 and one final review by an ad hoc committee of work group veterans, the voices from the teacher surveys and 130 members of the work groups fell silent except for their written recommendations. Before the board would discuss the recommendations, write revisions of their own, and vote on them, the democratic process included public hearings for concerned citizens to comment on the draft revisions and propose their own ideas about teaching world history.

Voice 3: The Public

Public testimony before the State Board of Education is well-intentioned, sometimes eccentric, often misinformed, or narrow, and rarely impactful. In the three opportunities afforded members of the public to voice their views, most speakers zeroed in on a specific statement in the TEKS that they wanted to delete or save. Rarely did anyone conceive of the standards as a holistic set of course guidelines, but at least two speakers underscored the expertise of the educator work groups who wrote the revisions. “Respect the work of these educators,” Corrisa Lopez, political director of the Texas Freedom Network, urged the board. “Give serious consideration to the revisions of the curricular work groups ... and adopt them,” reiterated Reverend John Elford, pastor of the University United Methodist Church in Austin.²² More frequent were comments on the same “hot topic” issues identified in teacher surveys, scholarly articles, and work group discussions: the treatment of Christianity, the Holocaust, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and “radical Islamic fundamentalism.”

Several speakers, confused by the TEKS organization into strands, wrongly thought that monotheism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the Holocaust were being deleted from the TEKS. No one who spoke on the Holocaust understood that the working group recommended removing only a redundant reference. All were reassured by board members Cargill, Hardy, and Mercer, that monotheism and the Holocaust were not being deleted from the TEKS. Indeed, prior to the discussion of world history guidelines, this trio had clearly advocated maintaining a bright Judeo-Christian thread in the United States history guidelines under review,²³ and they sympathetically listened to speakers opposed to deleting 13 F-- “explain how Arab rejection of the State of Israel has led to ongoing conflicts.” Advocates for 13 F found a vocal supporter in Ken Mercer, one of the most talkative members of the SBOE. At the September 11, 2018 public hearing, in response to grandmother Ann Stacey’s request to reinstate 13 F, Mercer replied, “I have that covered.”²⁴ Mercer reiterated his position at the November public hearing: “This is the amendment I put in ten years ago. It was stricken [by the work groups]. I put it back in.”²⁵ Responding to concerns of speakers who come before the

board is certainly appropriate, but Mercer is so talkative during public hearings that he is the only member admonished directly by the chair and acting chair to refrain from making long statements, disingenuously posed as questions, during the public commentary portion of the board's meetings.

Persistent public commentary for and against 13 F and 14 A and B created a heated and frustrating atmosphere in the boardroom. Alex McDonald of the Texas Coalition for Human Rights reminded board members that “. . . to broadly condemn a whole group is racist or xenophobic . . .” and that “It is incumbent upon us as Texans to really educate our children to be thinking critically . . .” Arguing that the Arab-Israeli conflict is best understood as a multi-causal phenomenon, University of Texas English professor Snehal Shingari added that the claim in 13 F “is not held up by historians . . . is ideologically biased . . . [and] patently untrue.” Hana Masri, a communications instructor at the University of Texas pointed to 13 F and 14 as oversimplified, misleading, and instigators of anti-Muslim bias. Advocates for 13 F steered clear of 14 but reiterated example after example of “Arab rejection of . . . Israel.” This one-sided view of conflict in the Middle East so aggravated Haithem El-Zabri, seated in the audience, that he interrupted Charles Kaufman, President of B'nai Brith International, and called out to the Board, “Excuse me. I'm Palestinian . . . this is misinformation. Why don't you ask me to speak on behalf of my people?” El-Zabri had spoken to the board just twenty minutes earlier for the two-minute allotment all speakers receive. “As an American,” he had begun, “I'm very concerned about our children being taught only one side of the story,” and he asked the board “to accept the original recommendation from the committee and strike out that line [13 F].” Following El-Zabri, Kaufman and Roy White, the founder of Truth in Textbooks, had argued in favor of retaining 13 F. Mercer extended their speaking time, but not El-Zabri's, by asking them to respond to questions and repeat their points. After listening to them for twenty minutes, El-Zabri could not contain himself. To the board's credit, El-Zabri was allowed to join the debate even though he had not been directly asked a question. Board member Rowley almost succeeded in bringing the endless back and forth to a conclusion when he gestured toward the speakers and said, “There's three sides, maybe four . . . don't we all agree it's a multi-faceted complex issue?” “Absolutely,” replied Kaufman. As White jumped back in to press his points, board member Bradley captured the frustration in the room by interrupting White and interjecting “I think Mr. Rowley summed it up. I implore the chair to move on.” Before she could call the next speakers, Mercer took one more opportunity to shore up 13 F: “It's a fact . . .”²⁶

Speakers linked the problem of exclusively blaming Arabs for Middle East conflict in 13 F to the dangers of the Islamophobic tone in 14. In response to questions from board member Erika Beltran, Alex McDonald moved from 13 F to 14, adding “for students to hear about terrorism in the context of one particular religion really creates a bias.” Picking up the thread of bias, Sabia Siddiqi of the Council for American-Islamic

Relations-Houston, explained how guidelines like 13 and 14 would isolate students of Islamic background, create tensions in the classroom, target students, and encourage bullying. Middle-school science teacher Shifra Bhatti pointed to anti-Muslim bias in the TEKS and delivered such compelling handouts to the board with recommendations for revisions that the Chair complimented her, and member Beltran posed questions that allowed Bhatti to expand her comments beyond the two-minute allotment. Her main point was to disentangle terrorism from the concept of “fundamental Islam.” She caught the attention of more board members than any other speaker, engaging Bahorich, Beltran, Bradley, Cargill, and Rowley, all of whom appeared to be thinking about how to implement Bhatti’s recommendations. McDonald had also proposed a revision for 14 that stripped out bias but was a less compelling public speaker than Bhatti who presented herself as a teacher, a Muslim, a mother, and wife who spoke on behalf of her husband, a social studies teacher.²⁷ Her testimony, as we will see, is a rare example of the board acting on a speaker’s suggestions.

Voice 4: Members of the State Board of Education

Board members are ultimately responsible for the knowledge statements and student expectations in the TEKS. They can accept or reject recommendations from work groups and the public. They can rewrite or compose standards as they wish and create a revised TEKS with a simple majority vote on each motion. Their debates, amendments, and votes on streamlining in September and especially November 2018, when the final revisions were adopted, demonstrate how recommendations from the work groups, based on the expertise and consensus of hundreds of teachers, lost traction compared to the predilections of a slight board member majority. Board members talked about world history very differently than teachers in the work groups. Work group discussions focused on content, pedagogy, historical methods, learning styles, interconnections of concepts, lesson plans, and instructional materials. While most board members remained silent on the details of world history, those that spoke relied on anecdote, unarticulated assumptions, and disingenuous reasoning.

Board members with the most experience in classroom education often reminded others to stick to streamlining material out rather than adding material in and to trust the recommendations of the work groups. An exception was Hardy, who despite her social studies teaching career, took issue with a number of work group recommendations, overturning some and diminishing the world history content in others. She regularly supported Mercer, who appears to care deeply about history but without professional training or experience. Wherever streamlining failed, Hardy and Mercer had a hand in it. More than any other board member, Mercer intervened to overturn workgroup recommendations and often carried a slim and silent board majority with him. Mercer and Hardy, who had shepherded the 2010 TEKS to approval,

were defending their earlier work but we also see how their efforts to shape the standards were imbued with an amalgam of Western civ bias, Christian Americanism ideology,²⁸ and hubris in place of the sound knowledge of world history content and methods that prevailed in the teacher work groups. For example, the world history work group recommended streamlining the guidelines for World War II by removing a list of “major causes and events” because it was somewhat redundant and did not reflect well a global approach to the war. Restricted from adding language (in the form of a more appropriate list of causes and events) to the TEKS, the work group explained that it was better to delete the current list and allow teachers to rely on approved instructional materials already in use that cover “causes and events” quite thoroughly. Both Hardy and Mercer were opposed to the recommendation and carried a majority of board members with them in a vote against the recommended streamlining.

Rather than follow suggestions in the work group rationale for composing a better list, which was within the board members’ purview, they kept the current list intact but deleted “Japanese imperialism” as a cause of the war since, as board chair Bahorich explained, Japanese imperialism is simply “included in the attack on Pearl Harbor.” The vote against streamlining and for deletion of Japanese imperialism took place despite member Cortez twice defending the work group’s recommendation and reading the rationale to the other board members.²⁹ Consequently, not only did the board majority reject the streamlining recommendation and add material back to the world history TEKS, they also further diminished the guidelines’ world history characteristics by asserting that the attack on the United States naval base at Pearl Harbor could stand in for the broader topic of Japanese colonialism and expansion in east Asia.

The SBOE meetings on November 13 and 14, 2018, when board members discussed the final adoption of TEKS revisions, allow us to see how the final voice among those that shape world history in Texas, failed, despite some good faith efforts, to resolve the problems with anti-Arab bias and Islamophobia acknowledged by all the other voices. At the November 13 board meeting, member Rowley motioned to accept the final work group recommendation to delete 13 F and add the phrase “including the Arab-Israeli conflict” to the end of 13 E. Thus, the new student expectation would read “summarize the rise of independence movements in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia and reasons for ongoing conflicts including the Arab-Israeli conflict.” Rowley explained that the revision was recommended by the work groups, supported by approximately one hundred comments from the public, and instead of ostracizing some students, the revision would be “a factually accurate writing of our student expectations.” Members Cortez, Beltran, Perez-Diaz, and Diaz spoke in favor of Rowley’s motion. Mercer was opposed. “This is a true thing, a factual thing,” he said to cap off a rambling set of comments about recent rocket attacks on Israel and a vague goal that all kids feel like Americans. Cargill supported Mercer by pointing out that the board had

received thirty-seven comments in favor of retaining 13 F and asserting, “I think we can trust our teachers to help our Arab students ...” Rowley’s motion subsequently failed by a vote of 8 to 6.³⁰ Thus, a slight majority of the board, most of whom remained silent during the debate, trumped the voices of academic researchers, survey data from hundreds of teachers, two world history teacher work groups, and a two-thirds majority of public speakers and commentators. We see the board majority exercise here a kind of undemocratic and hubristic executive privilege to articulate an unspoken set of assumptions, no doubt grounded within the general parameters of Christian Americanism, in the face of popular and clearly articulated reasoning in support of effective world history education.

Despite the victory of retaining 13 F in the original, Mercer motioned for a more detailed revision: “Explain how the rejection by the majority of Arab states of the State of Israel has led to ongoing conflict.” Member Allen, who had voted for Rowley’s motion, responded by pointing out that board members were simply not qualified to write guidelines. “We just don’t fully understand how to write a standard, . . .” he said. Mercer’s motion, Allen continued, is unteachable, untestable, and subjective. “This is not a good standard,” he added, “this needs to be worded in a way that it is a quality standard . . . not a reflection of feeling.” “We are not qualified to be . . . writing standards. . . . You can’t call a collection of information standards when that’s not what you have written. And that means there has to be some expertise right here ... or somebody to correct us when we’re wrong.” Despite Allen’s concern, members Mercer and Maynard, continued revising the standard to produce: “Discuss factors contributing to the Arab-Israeli conflict including the rejection of the existence of the State of Israel by the Arab League and a majority of Arab nations.” This new version of 13 F passed by a 9 to 5 vote.³¹

The board members’ efforts to rewrite knowledge statement 14 and student expectations A and B demonstrate member Allen’s characterization of the board lacking the expertise to write quality standards in world history. Hardy was opposed to revising 14 A and B and argued that when board members wrote the standards in 2010, they “were intending to respond to Islamic fundamentalism ... like in the Koran ... that we’re considered infidels and so that would be the fundamentalist concept again. It’s fundamental to some of their beliefs.”³² Hardy lost that argument, but rather than follow the teacher work group recommendation to compose a new knowledge statement that would cover significant world history issues from the late twentieth to the early twenty-first century, including Islamism, board members remained fixated on “radical Islam” and “terrorism.” Following up on middle school teacher Shifra Bhatti’s recommendations to disentangle Islamic fundamentalism from Islamic terrorism, member Beltran presented the board with a revision of 14 A and B. Quoting Bhatti, Beltran explained, “the Muslim religion does not promote or advocate for terrorism,” and added “. . . that’s what I’m trying to accomplish with these [revisions].”³³

Despite contributions from several board members to help edit Beltran’s proposed revisions and an overnight break which allowed time for revisiting work group recommendations, public testimony, and holding off-the-record conversations, the board wrote and approved standards that emphasize “radical Islamic terrorism” as the most prominent world history issue in the recent past. The revised standards omit the word “fundamentalism” but retain and repeat the phrase “radical Islamic terrorism” four times, one more mention of “terrorism” than in the original standard:³⁴

2010 TEKS	2018 Streamlined TEKS
(14) History. The student understands the development of radical Islamic fundamentalism and the subsequent use of terrorism by some of its adherents. The student is expected to:	(14) History. The student understands the development and use of radical Islamic terrorism in the second half of the 20th century and the early 21st century. The student is expected to:
(14)(A) summarize the development and impact of radical Islamic fundamentalism on events in the second half of the 20th century, including Palestinian terrorism and the growth of al Qaeda; and	(14)(A) explain the impact of geopolitical influences on the development of radical Islamic terrorism;
[Note the addition of (14) (B) in 2018.]	(14)(B) explain the impact of radical Islamic terrorism on global events; and
(14)(B) explain the U.S. response to terrorism from September 11, 2001, to the present.	(14)(C) explain the U.S. response to the events surrounding September 11, 2001, and other acts of radical Islamic terrorism.

In the board’s formulation, the topic of “radical Islamic terrorism” receives more space in the world history standards than topics such as the Renaissance and Reformation, the Maya, Aztec, and Inca civilizations, or the Great Depression.³⁵

Lessons Learned

What lessons about world history standards can we take away from the Texas experience? Most important, world history educators play a crucial role in writing world history standards. In the Texas case, teachers provide the greatest breadth of professional expertise in shaping world history education through survey data and the challenging work of drafting standards. In the 2018 streamlining process, multiple work

groups labored intensively to review the TEKS and write recommendations accompanied by rationales rooted in a deep knowledge of world history content and pedagogy. The board members approved the majority of recommendations for the tenth grade World History Studies course with little discussion, debate, or alteration. Consequently, we see that educators' voices had a vastly more significant impact on the TEKS than the voices of academics or members of the public. The 2022 TEKS review process was even more challenging. The TEA's proposed framework called for interleaving state, national, and world history throughout grades K-8. Consequently, work groups were charged with first rewriting tenth-grade guidelines to begin at 1200 CE and then writing wholly new standards to introduce pre-1200 world history at the third, fourth, and fifth grade levels.³⁶

Secondly, writing social studies standards for public schools in a democracy remains a fraught process. Despite the significant impact on the TEKS by educators involved in the 2018 streamlining process, board members allowed themselves a kind of executive privilege to edit or write standards. Thus, in the case of guidelines on Israel, Islam, and terrorism, a slight majority of the board rejected work group recommendations, reversed the goal of streamlining, and defended tendentious and narrow standards. Thus, it is fair to say that rarely do we see the board's privilege to edit and compose standards demonstrate an understanding of the concepts and content that underlie a world history sensibility. In other words, when the most powerful political voice in the standards writing process speaks, it diminishes the careful work of the educators who drafted the guidelines with a holistic world history course in mind.

In 2022, the democratic process gave a concerned group of public-school social studies educators the opportunity to present the board with an alternate set of recommendations that would make minor adjustments to the current K-8 TEKS while rejecting the newly written standards under the proposed TEA framework.³⁷ Some members of the board appeared quite sympathetic to the alternate proposal when it was presented at the June 2022 public hearing. Members of the ad hoc group were concerned about the shift in the draft standards toward an integrated synthesis of world, United States, and Texas history and the implicit demands it would make on teachers to retrain in world history. Additionally, there was great concern that Texas history would be watered down if it was interwoven with United States history in the new framework's plans for sixth, seventh, and eighth grades where students would "explore the history of the American continents and the place of Texas and the United States in the world."³⁸ These concerns led the SBOE to reject the draft standards and new framework proposed by TEA (10-4) and delay the review and revision of social studies guidelines until 2025 (8-7 vote).³⁹ The challenges of addressing world history do not completely account for the failure of the TEA's proposed framework or the board's inability to sort out the appropriate scope of TEKS revisions, but it is clear that world history is viewed by some as encroaching on state and national history in public school standards.

Finally, the reluctance to enhance world history education in Texas is an important reminder for all advocates of world history to continue the good work demonstrating how world history's global scale complements history study at the national and state scales. What can advocates of world history do? 1) Learn about the process for writing standards in your state and take advantage of any opportunity to participate in writing standards or commenting on them. 2) Speak at public hearings to advocate for world history. More important, provide decision makers at public hearings concrete, written proposals for new standards or revising old ones. Bring handouts. 3) At the university level, integrate a world history perspective into teacher training programs for future social studies educators. For example, at my university, the History Department and College of Education are collaborating on a course that integrates world, United States, and Texas history so that elementary education majors can better deliver social studies education to their future students. 4) Finally, it is important to support educators in gaining positions of authority in state-level education boards and agencies. That said, in Texas, party affiliation rather than educator status correlates more strongly to attitudes about social studies standards. Among the current fifteen members of the SBOE, four Democrats and four Republicans have made careers as educators.⁴⁰ Although board members are not outwardly partisan or organized into caucuses, there is a clear tendency for the six Democrats (two men, four women; three Hispanics, two African-Americans and one White) to support teacher-authored revisions to the TEKS, while the nine Republicans (five men, four women; nine Whites) tend to vote for the status quo embedded in the 2010 standards. Thus, to shape popularly elected boards, voting matters. In conclusion, diverse voices contribute to crafting social studies standards. World history voices must be avidly engaged in the conversation.

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Notes

¹ Each board member represents a geographically coherent district with a population of approximately 1.8 million people, <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-schools/general-information/school-district-locator>; and <https://tea.texas.gov/about-tea/leadership/state-board-of-education/sboe-board-members/sboe-members>.

² Unlike some of the expert reviewers in 2010, the content advisors in 2022 were all academic and education professionals in the social studies, including one specialist in world history, based at Texas school districts and universities; TEA, “Social Studies TEKS Review Content Advisors,” <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/curriculum-standards/teks-review/social-studies-teks-review-content-advisors>.

³ State Board of Education [hereafter SBOE], General Meeting of the Full Board, Archived Broadcast, September 2, 2022, 2:15:55-2:17:50. By voting to accept member Hickman’s motion for a new Social Studies TEKS review framework, the board rejected the previously approved review framework that included world history from early civilizations to ca. 1400 in grades three to five.

⁴ David C. Fisher, “A Missed Opportunity for World History in Texas,” in *Politics and the History Curriculum: The Struggle over Standards in Texas and the Nation*, ed. Keith A. Erikson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 190. I also published a briefer preliminary article: “What’s Wrong (and Right) with World History in Texas,” *World History Bulletin* 26, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 29–33.

⁵ Thomas W. Barker, “The Good, the Bad, and It Is Only Going to Get Uglier - Looking at the New Texas State Standards in World History,” *Middle Ground Journal*, no. 3 (Fall 2011), 6-10.

⁶ Mark A. Chancey, “Rewriting History for a Christian America: Religion and the Texas Social Studies Controversy of 2009-2010,” *The Journal of Religion* 94, no. 3 (2014): 329.

⁷ Chancey, “Rewriting History,” 353.

⁸ The Texas Freedom Network describes itself as “a nonpartisan, grassroots organization of . . . religious and community leaders who support religious freedom, individual liberties and public education.” Their Education Fund “supports research and civic education efforts that promote religious freedom, individual liberties and public education,” <https://tfn.org/mission/>.

⁹ Edward Countryman et al. “Complying with, Getting Around, and Bypassing the TEKS History Standards: A Review of Proposed Texas, U.S. and World History Textbooks in Texas” (Austin: Texas Freedom Network Education Fund, 2014), 55, https://tfn.org/cms/assets/uploads/2015/11/FINAL_Countryman_HIS.pdf.

¹⁰ Countryman, et al., 43-44.

¹¹ David R. Brockman, “More Balanced Than the Standards: A Review of the Presentation of Religion in Proposed Textbooks for High School World History in Texas” (Austin: Texas Freedom Network Education Fund, 2014), 3, https://tfn.org/cms/assets/uploads/2015/11/FINAL_Brockman_WH.pdf.

¹² David R. Brockman, “Religious Imbalance in the Texas Social Studies Curriculum: Analysis and Recommendations” (Houston: James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy of Rice University, 2016), <https://scholarship.rice.edu/handle/1911/92688>.

¹³ Tamer Balci, “Islam and the Middle East in Texas Textbooks,” *Digest of Middle East Studies* 27, no. 2 (2018): 256, <https://doi.org/10.1111/dome.12151>.

¹⁴ AP Central, “Update on AP World History,” author’s collection; originally published at <https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/courses/ap-world-history/course/announcement?course=ap-world-history>.

¹⁵ Texas Education Agency [hereafter TEA], “Social Studies Streamlining, Work Group A, World History,” <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Social%20Studies%20TEKS%20Streamlining%20Work%20Group%20A%20World%20History.pdf>.

¹⁶ For a list of work group participants and their affiliations, see TEA, “SBOE Social Studies TEKS Streamlining Work Groups,” <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Social%20Studies%20Streamlining%20Work%20Group%20List.pdf>.

¹⁷ Texas Administrative Code, “Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Social Studies Adopted November 2018,” [https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac\\$ext.ViewTAC?tac_view=4&ti=19&pt=2&ch=113](https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.ViewTAC?tac_view=4&ti=19&pt=2&ch=113).

¹⁸ TEA, “Work Group C Recommendations,” April 2018, <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Work%20Group%20C%20Social%20Studies%20TEKS%20Recommendations%20World%20History.pdf>.

¹⁹ TEA, “World History Studies Crosswalk from 2010 TEKS to 2018 Streamlined TEKS,” May 2019, <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/World%20History%20Crosswalk.pdf>.

²⁰ David R. Brockman, “Despite Reversal on Hillary and Helen Keller, ‘Christian Americanist’ Bias Remains in Texas Curriculum,” *Rewire News Group*, November 19, 2018, <https://rewirenewsgroup.com/religion-dispatches/2018/11/19/despite-reversal-on-hillary-and-hellen-keller-christian-americanist-bias-remains-in-texas-curriculum/>.

²¹ On the 2010 revisions by McLeroy, see TEA, “Proposed Revisions to 19 TAC Chapter 113, Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Social Studies, Subchapter C, High School: Approved for Second Reading and Final Adoption,” (May 21, 2010), 23, https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/all_HS_TEKS_2ndRdg.pdf. For the 2022 work group revisions, see TEA, “Work Group C: Draft Recommendations,” <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/curriculum-standards/teks-review/social-studies-teks-review-work-group-drafts>.

²² SBOE, Committee of the Full Board, Archived Broadcast, September 11, 2018, Part 1, 00:30:28 - 1:09:00, http://www.adminmonitor.com/tx/tea/committee_of_the_full_board/20180911/.

²³ SBOE, Committee of the Full Board, Archived Broadcast, June 12, 2018, Part 2, 00:53:00 - 1:22:00, http://www.adminmonitor.com/tx/tea/committee_of_the_full_board/20180612/1/.

²⁴ SBOE, Committee of the Full Board, Archived Broadcast, September 11, 2018, Part 2, 1:50:00 - 1:55:00, http://www.adminmonitor.com/tx/tea/committee_of_the_full_board/20180911/2/.

²⁵ SBOE, Committee of the Full Board, Archived Broadcast, November 13, 2018, Part 1, 1:20:30, http://www.adminmonitor.com/tx/tea/committee_of_the_full_board/20181113/.

²⁶ SBOE, Committee of the Full Board, Archived Broadcast, November 13, 2018, Part 1, 1:41:20 - 3:10:00, http://www.adminmonitor.com/tx/tea/committee_of_the_full_board/20181113/.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ For examples of Mercer and Hardy’s arguments to emphasize Judeo-Christian elements in the TEKS, see their participation in “Public Hearing on Proposed Revisions to ... TEKS for Social Studies,” SBOE, Committee of the Full Board, Archived Broadcast, June 12, 2018, Part 2, 00:53:00 - 1:22:00, http://www.adminmonitor.com/tx/tea/committee_of_the_full_board/20180612/1/; and for their comments about work group recommendations to delete redundant mentions of Judaism and Christianity from the world history TEKS, see SBOE, Committee of the Full Board, Archived Broadcast, June 13, 2018, Part 2, 3:34:58 - 3:51:00, http://www.adminmonitor.com/tx/tea/committee_of_the_full_board/20180613/2/.

²⁹ SBOE, Committee of the Full Board, Archived Broadcast, September 12, 2018, Part 3, 00:48:00 - 1:00:00, http://www.adminmonitor.com/tx/tea/committee_of_the_full_board/20180912/3/.

³⁰ SBOE, Committee of the Full Board, Archived Broadcast, November 13, 2018, Part 3, 2:02:30 - 2:16:30, http://www.adminmonitor.com/tx/tea/committee_of_the_full_board/20181113/.

³¹ Ibid., 2:19:00 - 2:35:30.

³² Ibid., 2:42:35 - 2:46:00.

³³ SBOE, Committee of the Full Board, Archived Broadcast, November 13, 2018, Part 3, 2:35:40 - 2:46; and November 14, Part 1, 1:04:30 - 1:40:25, http://www.adminmonitor.com/tx/tea/committee_of_the_full_board/20181114/.

³⁴ TEA, “World History Studies, Crosswalk from 2010 TEKS to 2018 Streamlined TEKS.”

³⁵ TEA, “Proposed Revisions to . . . Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Social Studies, World History Studies, Adopted 2018, 76-78, <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/113a-d.pdf>.

³⁶ TEA, “Proposed K-8 Social Studies Framework,” <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/k-8-ss-framework-one-pager.pdf>; and “Social Studies TEKS Review Work Group Drafts,” <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/curriculum-standards/teks-review/social-studies-teks-review-work-group-drafts>. I was invited by the TEA to participate in the Grades 3-5 World History work group and attended two of the three multi-day sessions in June 2022 to write new guidelines.

³⁷ Marci Deal, et al., “Enhanced K-8 Proposal,” author’s collection; and SBOE, Committee of the Full Board, Archived Broadcast, June 15, 2022, 12:50:00 - 13:04:25, https://www.adminmonitor.com/tx/tea/committee_of_the_full_board/20220615/.

³⁸ TEA, “Social Studies TEKS Review Work Group F Recommendations,” August 2022, <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/curriculum-standards/teks-review/social-studies-teks-review-work-group-drafts>.

³⁹ SBOE, Meeting of the Full Board, Archived Broadcast, September 2, 2022, 2:15:00 – 03:02:00 https://www.adminmonitor.com/tx/tea/general_meeting/20220902/.

⁴⁰ TEA, “SBOE Members,” September, 2, 2022, <https://tea.texas.gov/about-tea/leadership/state-board-of-education/sboe-board-members/sboe-members>.