

Book Review

Stephen Jackson, *The Patchwork of World History in Texas High Schools: Unpacking Eurocentrism, Imperialism, and Nationalism in the Curriculum, 1920-2021*. New York: Routledge, 2022. Pp. 220. \$160.00 (hardcover).

Right-wing assaults on secondary and post-secondary learning have reengaged the fight over what history is and who has a right to learn it. This critical argument is also the topic of Stephen Jackson's *The Patchwork of World History in Texas High Schools*. The author examines the roles of policymakers and educators in making and remaking World History knowledge over a century of Texas history. Jackson uses the state's large population and role as a historical cornerstone of the textbook market to extrapolate larger national trends in World History education. He argues that while lawmakers, academics, and educators debate the content and structure of the secondary World History course, themes of nationalism, presentism, and Eurocentrism persist in curricula and textbooks.

The Patchwork of World History in Texas High Schools is organized into two broad sections – one focused on an analysis of secondary World History course textbooks, and one dedicated to the persistence of thematic narratives: Eurocentrism, nationalism, and presentism. Jackson's methodology is clear and precise to answer specific questions about World History courses that, as he points out, have already been answered for American History. In doing so, he focuses on the traditional course that is more widely available and susceptible to policy shifts, and textbooks, which Jackson accurately defines as critical to the World History curriculum due to a lack of specific World History training in education programs.

The strength of Jackson's work is a clear vision of World History courses and textbooks as a framework for debates of both scholarship and policy – a trend that transcends education by grade level and subject matter. He begins by describing the turbulence of curricular changes and frameworks brought on by definitions and redefinitions of World History as a field. Prior to the establishment of World History as an academic discipline, secondary World History courses strayed from the model of postsecondary Western Civ courses to account for adaptability to world events and the desires of public officials. As Jackson notes, “assumptions of Eurocentrism, nationalism,

and presentism were staples of the course throughout,” but it remained flexible to the expansion of new time periods, peoples, and trends (50).

Educators who have entered the field in the last decade would benefit from Jackson’s thorough examination of the national standards movement, which many education and certification programs omit in favor of an expedient history beginning at George W. Bush’s “No Child Left Behind” (2001). This detailed account of the World History standards movement provides not only a critical timeline on the standards process and its link to textbook publication, but a reflection on modern discussion between professional historians and K12 educators. In walking through the adoption of the *Framework for the Social Studies* and Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) from 1980 to 2018, Jackson highlights familiar political attacks on historical methods, global peoples and religions, as well as historians’ reactions and protests to those attacks. Moreover, he examines the ways that textbook coverage of Eurocentrism continued even while coverage of global communities increased. While professional historians saw this trend as a “yawning gap” between standards and professional historians, Jackson argues that “if, rather than faulting the curriculum for not matching professional historical standards, we compare the 2010 standards to those that came before...it is clear that they represent a major improvement” (74-75).

In evaluating the content of World History textbooks, Jackson delves into the language and terminology used to describe non-Western peoples, the subject of modern imperialism, and the ties of democracy and capitalism. Texas World History textbooks persistently depict Western nations as modern and developed and non-Western nations as developing, traditional, and ancient. He acknowledges the ambiguity of these terms, noting that “more than 90% of Texas World History textbooks do not even provide a definition of the term [modern], and the definitions that *do* exist are nebulous at best” (93). Imperialist notions are centered on the same principle of asserting Western (or, at least, American) superiority over the rest of the world. Textbook depictions of United States imperialism vary from euphemistic phrasings like rising as a “global power” to an emphasis on altruism and outright assertions of imperialism. But as Jackson asserts, each of these definitions exerts United States imperialism as the “best kind of empire” (133), never undercutting American exceptionalism.

The predominance of nationalism and American exceptionalism are equally prominent in the final chapter, which evaluates the shift in textbook material as anxieties about the supremacy of democracy and capitalism changed over time. Texts that first sought to challenge students to think critically about democracy and its relative merits quickly shifted to a defense of democracy in the Cold War. In the post-Cold War era, textbooks continued to focus on democracies and their spread globally. Jackson notes, “Countries or regions without democratic governments did not have ideologies or systems to be taken as serious alternatives, they were just behind the historical curve” (160). In many ways, the description of non-democratic governments Jackson describes

here are similar to his examples on Western-centered language. And as he argues in the last sentences of the final chapter, such a “shallow understanding” (162) of capitalist democracy does not prepare students for effective citizenship – one principle that both historians and public officials agree is an essential component to history education.

The Patchwork of World History in Texas High Schools is a master class in historically contextualizing education policy in the State of Texas and the field of World History. Historians and K12 educators seeking to bridge the gap between secondary and postsecondary education have much to gain from Jackson’s perspective, which reframes secondary schools as important agents, rather than passive actors in the curricula debate. History students, especially those hoping to teach, will gain critical insight into the politically driven system that they must navigate for themselves and their students. Finally, Jackson’s work is a first in what can and should be a larger, vibrant, and inclusive discussion of World History texts, curricula, and pedagogy.

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