

ized the white male adventurer as the central hero of national history, with the woman as sunbonneted helpmate, then we might better understand the dehumanized ways in which women have continued to be treated. A more truthful origin narrative could also help break down divisions among peoples of color by revealing common experiences and histories of cooperation.

A new origin narrative and national identity could help pave the way to a more livable society for us all. A society based on cooperation rather than competition, on the idea that all living creatures are interdependent and that humanity's goal should be balance. Such were the values of many original Americans, deemed "savages." Similar gifts are waiting from other despised peoples and traditions. We might well start by recognizing that "America" is the name of an entire hemisphere, rich in a stunning variety of histories, cultures and peoples—not just one country.

The choice seems clear, if not easy. We can go on living in a state of massive denial, affirming this nation's superiority and virtue simply because we need to believe in it. We can choose to believe the destiny of the United States is still manifest: global domination. Or we can seek a transformative vision that carries us forward, not backward. We can seek an origin narrative that lays the groundwork for a multicultural, multinational identity centered on the goals of social equity and democracy. We do have choices.

There is little time for nostalgia. Dick and Jane never were "America," they were only one part of one community in one part of one country in one part of one continent. Yet we have let their image define our entire society and its values. Will the future be marked by ongoing denial or by steps toward a new vision in which White Supremacy no longer determines reality? When on earth will we transcend the assumptions that imprison our minds?

At times you can hear the clock ticking.

*WHOSE CHICANO HISTORY DID YOU LEARN?
AND
REINVENTING "AMERICA":
CALL FOR A NEW NATIONAL IDENTITY*

**A NATION WHICH NEGLECTS
THE TRUTH OF ITS PAST
HAS NO FUTURE**



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*By Elizabeth (Betita) Martinez
Chapters 4 and 5 of *Dox Colores Means All of Us**

WHOSE CHICANO HISTORY DID YOU LEARN?

When we read a social studies textbook for fifth graders that refers to slavery as a "life-style," we might think it's some book from the 1940s or 1950s. But such descriptions can be found in the glossy series published by Houghton Mifflin in the 1990s. Even worse, the series was supposed to make a major break with the longtime Eurocentric textbook tradition. Adopted for use in California, among other states, these books provoked a storm of controversy.

California had invited publishers to submit new history texts for kindergarten through eighth grade (K-8) as part of an overall effort to upgrade its instructional materials and methods. Houghton Mifflin was the only house that submitted books for all those grades. It also was the only press that prepared books specifically intended to fit into a new history and social studies "framework," or curriculum, that California had adopted in 1987.

The framework called for pupils to study history much earlier and more extensively than in the past. Recognizing that the majority of California's 3.7 million elementary and junior high pupils were people of color, California education officials also required that textbooks "accurately portray the cultural and racial diversity of our society." The Houghton Mifflin series' main author is Gary Nash, a University of California, Los Angeles, professor with a reputation for advocating multiculturalism.

California's Board of Education adopted the Houghton Mifflin series and an additional eighth-grade history from Holt, Rinehart & Winston despite protests from thousands of people in virtually every racial and ethnic sector (including Muslims, who had been the first to object), as well as gays, lesbians and the disabled. Since local school districts in California are not legally obliged to buy the state-approved books, the struggle continued.

Eventually most local school boards adopted the approved texts, sometimes with supplemental readings. In Oakland, where students of color form almost 92 percent of the school population, both the Houghton Mifflin series and the Holt, Rinehart & Winston title were rejected. In San Francisco, where 83 percent of the student population is of color, the new books were finally adopted on the condition that supplemental readings be used. However, the school district placed only one copy of each supplemental title in each school.

Behind all the highly publicized debate, one can assume some heavy-duty politicking. On the strictly commercial level, Houghton Mifflin calculated that, in California alone, sales of the series could

from a crippling self-definition? Is it possible the long-standing belief that "American exceptionalism" had made freedom possible might be rejected someday?

The Vietnam syndrome is partly rooted in the fact that, although other societies have also been based on colonialism and slavery, ours seems to have an insatiable need to be the "good guys" on the world stage. That need must lie at least partially in a Protestant dualism that defines existence in terms of opposites, so that if you are not "good" you are bad, if not "white" then Black, and so on. Whatever the cause, the need to be seen as virtuous, compared to someone else's evil, haunts U.S. domestic and foreign policy. Where on earth would we be without Saddam Hussein, Qaddafi, and that all-time favorite of gringo demonizers, Fidel Castro? Gee whiz, how would we know what an American really is?

Today's origin myth and the resulting concept of national identity make for an intellectual prison where it is dangerous to ask big questions about this society's superiority. When otherwise decent people are trapped in such a powerful desire not to feel guilty, self-deception becomes unavoidable. To cease our present falsification of collective memory should, and could, open the doors of that prison. When together we cease equating whiteness with Americanness, a new day can dawn. As David Roediger, the social historian, has said, "[Whiteness] is the empty and therefore terrifying attempt to build an identity on what one isn't, and on whom one can hold back."

Redefining the U.S. origin narrative, and with it this country's national identity, could prove liberating for our collective psyche. It does not mean Euro-Americans should wallow individually in guilt. It does mean accepting collective responsibility to deal with the implications of our real origin. A few apologies, for example, might be a step in the right direction. In 1997, the idea was floated in Congress to apologize for slavery; it encountered opposition from all sides. But to reject the notion because corrective action, not an apology, is needed misses the point. Having defined itself as the all-time best country in the world, the United States fiercely denies the need to make a serious, official apology for anything (I'm not counting the unofficial apologies that Clinton issued as an individual in 1998, so cautiously worded that they were meaningless). To press for any serious, official apology does imply a new origin narrative, a new self-image, an ideological sea-change.

Accepting the implications of a different narrative could also shed light on today's struggles. In the affirmative-action struggle, for example, opponents have said that that policy is no longer needed because racism ended with the Civil Rights Movement. But if we look at slavery as a fundamental pillar of this nation, going back centuries, it becomes obvious that racism could not have been ended by 30 years of mild reforms. If we see how the myth of the frontier ideal-

(Indian, Mexican). "Manifest" meant "God-given," and the whole doctrine is profoundly rooted in religious conviction going back to the earliest colonial times. In his short, powerful book *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right*, Professor Anders Stephanson tells how the Puritans reinvented the Jewish notion of chosenness and applied it to this hemisphere so that territorial expansion became God's will.

Linking the national identity with race is not unique to the United States. National identity always requires an "other" to define it. But this country has linked its identity with race to an extraordinary degree, matched only by two other settler states: South Africa and Israel. Given its obsession with race and the supremacy attached to whiteness, the U.S. national identity inevitably reserved a special disdain for "half-breed" peoples—above all, Mexicans. "The West" documentary series reflects that disdain with its offhand treatment of Manifest Destiny and the U.S. expansionist takeover of Mexico, violations of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, land robbery, colonization backed by violent repression, the role of Mexican people in building vast wealth in the West, and the West as a reflection of Mexican culture. In doing so the series typifies all the other standard historical treatments of people of Mexican origin. Who could care less? is their message. If anyone in this society remembers Mexicans before the twentieth century, it is usually as "bandits" who fought the U.S. occupation, or señoritas on big California ranchos who had the good sense to marry Anglos. Almost never have we formed part of the origin myth.

Manifest Destiny Dies Hard

The concept of Manifest Destiny, with its assertion of racial superiority sustained by military power, has defined U.S. identity for 150 years. Only the Vietnam War brought a serious challenge to that concept of almightiness. Bitter debate, moral anguish, images of My Lai and the prospect of military defeat for the first time in U.S. history all suggested that the long-standing marriage of virtue and violence might soon be on the rocks. In the final years of the war the words leaped to mind one day: this country is having a national nervous breakdown.

Perhaps this is why the Vietnam War continues to arouse passions today. Some who are willing to call the war "a mistake" still shy away from recognizing its immorality or even accepting it as a defeat. A few Americans have the courage to conclude from the Vietnam War that we should abandon the idea that our identity rests on being the world's richest, most powerful and indeed *best* nation. Is it possible that the so-called Vietnam syndrome might signal liberation

yield \$52 million. With so much at stake, Houghton Mifflin for the first time in its history hired a public relations firm to help win state approval.

But much more complex and powerful forces were at work on the ideological and political level. The new California framework was written by Diane Ravitch, a U.S. Department of Education official. She and several colleagues in the education field received heavy funding from the conservative Olin Foundation, which supports right-wing think tanks, according to an exposé in the *San Francisco Examiner* (May 28, 1992). The article described "an interlocking network of educational reformers, their work supported by conservative foundations and [funds from] a Republican administration" that works in the field of education parallel to "a similar network of rightist think tanks and advocacy groups, also funded by conservative foundations, seeking to control the nation's political debate." The goal is a "multicultural" history curriculum that ostensibly celebrates diversity but basically celebrates melting-pot assimilationism. Behind this move to co-opt multiculturalism was a web of relationships among academics, government officials and activists.

When the Houghton Mifflin titles implementing the new Ravitch framework appeared, they were defended as a vast improvement over the past, with much more information about people of color and their perspectives. "We have 80 pages on African history for 12-year-olds," Gary Nash pointed out. But a numerical increase in textual references or images doesn't promote multiculturalism if the content leaves a fundamentally Eurocentric worldview in place. The occasional inclusion of dissenting views from people of color may give some balance to isolated passages; it does not alter the dominant perspective.

The worldview put forth in these texts rests on defining the United States as "a nation of immigrants." This view sees Native Americans as the first "immigrants," based on their having come across the Bering Strait from Asia (but isn't this theory rejected by many Indians?). After Native Americans come Africans (but weren't they brought here in chains?) and then Mexicans (but wasn't their homeland seized by Anglo force?). Europeans and Asians round out the list of so-called immigrants.

The immigrant model has usually included the "melting pot" metaphor; the Houghton Mifflin series rejects that now tarnished image in favor of the "salad bowl," which allows different peoples to retain their ethnic identity and culture inside one big unified society. But how different is the bowl from the pot?

Both images liquidate issues of power and domination, such as which groups in society have power and which don't or which groups dominate and which are dominated. Both are molded by a national identity firmly rooted in an Anglo-American culture and perspective.

As critics of the textbooks pointed out, the norm to which so-called immigrants are supposed to relate is white, Anglo-Saxon and usually Protestant—in short, WASP. (Thus the Mexican American, for example, is not a “real” American.) The Houghton Mifflin texts hammer home the power and authority of this norm with an extraordinary quantity of U.S. flags: in the K-5 books alone, there are 29 depictions of U.S. flags, compared with zero flags from other nations.

The Eurocentric viewpoint of the series can be found in its treatment of all U.S. peoples of color, exemplified by one sentence in a literature selection in the Grade 5 textbook: “She had blue eyes and white skin, like an angel” (which reduces us darkies to being devils, I assume). Scores of inaccuracies, distortions, sanitizations, omissions and outright racist accounts pepper these books. In reviewing how the Houghton Mifflin books depict Mexican Americans and other Latinos in the United States, we find five major problems, ranging from general perspective to the handling of key events involving people of Mexican origin. The first general question is, do we even exist?

Making Latinos Invisible

Increasing the quantity of references to a people doesn't make a textbook multicultural or non-racist, as we said; at the same time, invisibility definitely hurts. The Houghton Mifflin series gives very shabby treatment to Latinos in this respect.

By the third grade, it would seem reasonable to expect some real awareness of Mexicans in the United States, especially when the textbook *From Sea to Shining Sea* has a 60-page unit called “Settling the Land.” Wrong; in the whole book, Mexican Americans appear only as farmworkers, and even then their historic role in producing vast agricultural wealth is not recognized (nor is that of Filipinos). A single photo shows an orchard with a rain of almonds being shaken out of the trees—by machine, not people. Nowhere does the text say that agriculture was made possible in the Southwest by an art that Mexicans and Native Americans taught to Anglos—irrigation.

The fourth-grade book, *Oh California*, offers many Latinos, but they are almost all “explorers” and “settlers,” missionaries, or upper-class ranchers. Nowhere can we find the lower-class Mexicans, the laborers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nowhere can we find the many Mexicans who were violently repressed and driven off the land—often even lynched—from the Gold Rush days to the 1930s. Nowhere do we read about the massive strikes by Mexican workers in the 1930s or the deportation of thousands who were actually citizens. Chicanos and Mexicans vanish totally from California for 100 pages. Then we find a paragraph on East Los Angeles that includes Mexicans in a listing of all immigrant groups. It doesn't say

eight-part documentary series of 1996 titled “The West” is a case in point. It devoted more than the usual attention to the devastation of Native Americans, but still centered on Anglos and gave little attention to why their domination evolved as it did. The West thus remained the physically gorgeous backdrop for an ugly, unaltered origin myth.

In fact, “The West” series strengthens that myth. White Supremacy needs the brave but inevitably doomed Indians to silhouette its own inevitable conquest. It needs the Indian-as-devil to sustain its own holy mission. Remember Timothy Wight, who served as pastor to Congress in the late 1700s and wrote that, under the Indians, “Satan ruled unchallenged in America” until “our chosen race eternal justice sent.” With that self-declared moral authority, the “winning of the West” metamorphosed from a brutal, bloody invasion into a crusade of brave Christians marching across a lonely, dangerous landscape.

Racism as Linchpin of the U.S. National Identity

A crucial embellishment of the origin myth and key element of the national identity has been the myth of the frontier, analyzed in Richard Slotkin's *Gunfighter Nation* (1992), the last volume of a fascinating trilogy. He describes Theodore Roosevelt's belief that the West was won thanks to American arms, “the means by which progress and nationality will be achieved.” That success, Roosevelt continued, “depends on the heroism of men who impose on the course of events the latent virtues of their ‘race.’” Roosevelt saw conflict on the frontier producing a species of virile “fighters and breeders” who would eventually generate a new leadership class. Militarism thus went hand in hand with the racialization of history's protagonists.

No slouch as an imperialist, Roosevelt soon took the frontier myth abroad, seeing Asians as Apaches and the Philippines as Sam Houston's Texas in the process of being seized from Mexico. For Roosevelt, Slotkin writes, “racial violence [was] the principle around which both individual character and social organization develop.” Such ideas have not remained totally unchallenged by U.S. historians, nor was the frontier myth always applied in totally simplistic ways by Hollywood and other media. (The outlaw, for example, is a complicated figure, both good and bad.) Still, the frontier myth traditionally spins together virtue and violence, morality and war, in a convoluted, Calvinist web. That tortured embrace defines an essence of the so-called American character—the national identity—to this day.

The frontier myth embodied the nineteenth-century concept of Manifest Destiny, a doctrine that served to justify expansionist violence by means of intrinsic racial superiority. Manifest Destiny saw Yankee conquest as the inevitable result of a confrontation between

continues with the brave Pilgrims, a revolution by independence-loving colonists against a decadent English aristocracy and the birth of an energetic young republic that promised democracy and equality (that is, to white male landowners). In the 1840s, the new nation expanded its size by almost one-third, thanks to a victory over that backward land of little brown people called Mexico. Such has been the basic account of how the nation called the United States of America came into being as presently configured.

The myth's omissions are grotesque. It ignores three major pillars of our nationhood: genocide, enslavement and imperialist expansion (such nasty words, who wants to hear them?—but that's the problem). The massive extermination of indigenous peoples provided our land base; the enslavement of African labor made our economic growth possible; and the seizure of half of Mexico by war (or threat of renewed war) extended this nation's boundaries north to the Pacific and south to the Rio Grande. Such are the foundation stones of the United States, within an economic system that made this country the first in world history to be born capitalist.

Those three pillars were, of course, supplemented by great numbers of dirt-cheap workers from Mexico, China, the Philippines, Puerto Rico and other countries, all of them kept in their place by White Supremacy. In history they stand alongside millions of less-than-supreme white workers and sharecroppers.

Any attempt to modify the present origin myth provokes angry efforts to repel such sacrilege. In the case of Native Americans, scholars will insist that they died from disease or wars among themselves, or that "not so many really did die." At worst it was a "tragedy," but never deliberate genocide, never a pillar of our nationhood. As for slavery, it was an embarrassment, of course, but do remember that Africa also had slavery and anyway enlightened white folk finally did end the practice here.

In the case of Mexico, reputable U.S. scholars still insist on blaming that country for the 1846–48 war. Yet even former U.S. President Ulysses Grant wrote in his memoirs that "[w]e were sent to provoke a fight [by moving troops into a disputed border area] but it was essential that Mexico should commence it [by fighting back]." (*Mr. Lincoln's General: Ulysses S. Grant, an illustrated autobiography* [New York: Dutton, 1959].) President James Polk's 1846 diary records that he told his cabinet his purpose in declaring war as "acquiring California, New Mexico, and perhaps other Mexican lands." (*Diary of James K. Polk 1845–49* [Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1910].) To justify what could be called a territorial drive-by, the Mexican people were declared inferior; the U.S. had a "Manifest Destiny" to bring them progress and democracy.

Even when revisionist voices expose particular evils of Indian policy, slavery or the war on Mexico, they remain little more than un-

that they formed the original population of Los Angeles and have continued to be a strong presence for more than 200 years.

Oh California briefly describes the United Farm Workers, led by Cesar Chávez, in the series' only account of Chicano/Mexicano struggle for social change in this country. We find nothing about how the courageous farmworkers stood up to mass arrests, beatings and harassment by the growers and their goons. Nothing about Dolores Huerta—one of the best-known women activists for social justice in the United States today—who headed the union along with Chávez until his death in 1993. Nothing about the ongoing struggle against pesticides. And nothing about other movements of California Chicanos, such as the walkouts by thousands of high school students in 1968 and the anti-Vietnam War march of some 20,000 people on August 29, 1970, that ended with a police riot leaving hundreds of peaceful demonstrators teargassed and three Chicanos dead. A picture of one "Chicano Power" mural is apparently supposed to suffice for all that mass activism.

In *America Will Be*, a basic fifth-grade U.S. history book, Latinos as people do not exist beyond immigration statistics and other lists, with the exception of a single family presented out of context. Even Latinos as governmental figures vanish after three pages on Juan de Oñate, who invaded New Mexico for Spain in 1598. If it is hard to find Mexicans or Chicanos and Chicanas in this series, other Latinos are even less visible. After profiling the great baseball player and humanitarian Roberto Clemente in the Grade 2 text, the series abandons Puerto Ricans. For the millions of Central Americans resident in the United States, Houghton Mifflin includes a single nameless young woman who came from Guatemala for unspecified reasons and lives an undescribed life here (Grade 3 text). In Grades 4 and 5 we get one and two sentences, respectively, referring to refugees from Cuba and Central America—with no explanation of why they had fled.

Eurocentrism and Its Values

The second overarching error of the series, Eurocentrism, begins with the books for kindergarten and Grade 1, *The World I See* and *I Know a Place*. Both include a thematic photo showing several young pupils of color, including a probable Latino, and the K volume has one story about Mexico. But the drawings in the "Long Ago" pages of the K book are overwhelmingly populated by white people for no historical reason. In one case, out of 35 people we see 31 whites; another makes all 20 people white; and so forth. In the Grade 1 book, everyone from the past is white (e.g., a unit called

"Grandma's Album" and another called "I Go with My Family to Grandma's"). The message comes across loud and clear: the foundations of our country are Euro-American (or perhaps people of color never had grannies?). Yet Mexicans settled in what is now the United States from 1598 on—more than 20 years before the *Mayflower* landed at Plymouth.

Some People I Know (Grade 2) introduces Teresa Sánchez of East Los Angeles. The text puts a healthy stress on the merits of being bilingual and bicultural like Teresa, but why did they make her a totally Anglo-looking girl? Any Latina—like this writer—who has grown up longing for blond hair and light-colored eyes will know what a bad message this conveys, especially when everyone else in Teresa's family is dark. (She must be one of those angels.)

A special form of the Eurocentric perspective, Hispanicism, flows through the Houghton Mifflin series. Again and again the "customs," "culture" and "traditions" of the Mexican people in the United States are described as originating in Spain. Indigenous, mestizo and African roots go unnoticed. This would be laughable (how many people in Madrid eat tortillas and beans?) if it were not so racist.

The Houghton Mifflin authors actually discuss Eurocentrism (Grade 8), defining it as "the notion that Europe is the center of the world." Then, however, they support that point of view by stating: "And for a long period of time it seemed to be. From the 1500s to the 1990s, European countries controlled a large part of the world." Ignoring the imperialist policies behind that control, the explanation leaves readers with a very Eurocentric view of Eurocentrism. The same book tells us that "U.S. citizens ... tended to look on Mexico as a backward nation, an attitude that has continued to this day." No criticism or alternative view is suggested.

If one of the goals of Eurocentrism is to make U.S. history a more comfortable abode for white people, the fifth-grade textbook shows how. The teacher's edition suggests an exercise in which students are asked to think about what it is like to move into a neighborhood or even a new country: What are the neighbors like? Is it scary? It then says, "Lead them [the students] to understand that the colonists in America shared many of the same experiences and feelings." What a novel way to imagine seizing someone else's land! Other examples of sanitized treatment abound. For example, the often deadly racism practiced against Mexicans in the Southwest is described as "considerable discrimination" (Grade 4) and "prejudice" (Grade 5).

The series is riddled with a Eurocentric vocabulary: "discoveries," "the New World," "the Age of Exploration" and "Moving West." It also manipulates the reader with self-justifying types of word usage. Again and again Anglo-Americans' "belief" in the rightness of their actions is used to justify how Mexican people and Native

majority of people of color in 20 to 30 years at most, with the nation as a whole not far behind.

Check out the February 3, 1992, issue of *Sports Illustrated* with its double-spread ad for *Time* magazine. The ad showed hundreds of newborn babies in their hospital cribs, all of them Black or brown except for a rare white face here and there. The headline says, "Hey, whitey! It's your turn at the back of the bus!" The ad then tells you, read *Time* magazine to keep up with today's hot issues. That manipulative image could have been published today; its implication of shifting power appears to be the recurrent nightmare of too many potential Anglo allies.

Euro-American anxiety often focuses on the sense of a vanishing national identity. Behind the attacks on immigrants, affirmative action and multiculturalism, behind the demand for "English Only" laws and the rejection of bilingual education, lies the question: with all these new people, languages and cultures, what will it mean to be an American? If that question once seemed, to many people, to have an obvious, universally applicable answer, today new definitions must be found. But too often Americans, with supposed scholars in the lead, refuse to face that need and instead nurse a nostalgia for some bygone clarity. They remain trapped in denial.

An array of such ostriches, heads in the sand, began flapping their feathers noisily with the publication of Allan Bloom's 1987 best-selling book, *The Closing of the American Mind*. Bloom bemoaned the decline of our "common values" as a society, meaning the decline of Euro-American cultural centrality (shall we just call it cultural imperialism?). Since then we have seen constant sniping at "diversity" goals across the land. The assault has often focused on how U.S. history is taught. And with reason, for this country's identity rests on a particular narrative about the historical origins of the United States as a nation.

The Great White Origin Myth

Every society has an origin narrative that explains that society to itself and the world with a set of stories and symbols. The origin myth, as scholar-activist Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz has termed it, defines how a society understands its place in the world and its history. The myth provides the basis for a nation's self-defined identity. Most origin narratives can be called myths because they usually present only the most flattering view of a nation's history; they are not distinguished by honesty.

Ours begins with Columbus "discovering" a hemisphere where some 80 million people already lived but didn't really count (in what became the United States, they were just buffalo-chasing "savages" with no grasp of real estate values and therefore doomed to perish). It

as a nation and then reimagine it as a "world": a community of communities relating on the basis of mutual respect and integrity.

Such a goal would require a massive shift in power relations throughout U.S. society. It sounds like a dream, like the idea of textbooks that make real sense out of American history. Still, defining one's goals—no matter how distant they may seem—matters. Honesty about the past can shine the light of freedom on a new kind of future.

REINVENTING "AMERICA"

Call for a New National Identity

For some 15 years, starting in 1940, 85 percent of all U.S. elementary schools used the Dick and Jane series to teach children how to read. The series starred Dick, Jane, their white middle-class parents, their dog Spot and their life together in a home with a white picket fence.

"Look, Jane, look! See Spot run!" chirped the two kids. It was a house full of glorious family values, where Mom cooked while Daddy went to work in a suit and mowed the lawn on weekends. The Dick and Jane books also taught that you should do your job and help others. All this affirmed an equation of middle-class with whiteness with virtue.

In the mid-1990s, museums, libraries and 80 Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) stations across the country had exhibits and programs commemorating the series. At one museum, an attendant commented, "When you hear someone crying, you know they are looking at the Dick and Jane books." It seems nostalgia runs rampant among many Euro-Americans: a nostalgia for the days of unchallenged White Supremacy—both moral and material—when life was "simple."

We've seen that nostalgia before in the nation's history. But today it signifies a problem reaching a new intensity. It suggests a national identity crisis that promises to bring in its wake an unprecedented nervous breakdown for the dominant society's psyche.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in California, which has long been on the cutting edge of the nation's present and future reality. Warning sirens have sounded repeatedly in the 1990s, such as the fierce battle over new history textbooks for public schools, Proposition 187's ugly denial of human rights to immigrants, the 1996 assault on affirmative action that culminated in Proposition 209, and the 1997 move to abolish bilingual education. Attempts to copycat these reactionary measures have been seen in other states.

The attack on affirmative action isn't really about affirmative action. Essentially it is another tactic in today's war on the gains of the 1960s, a tactic rooted in Anglo resentment and fear. A major source of that fear: the fact that California will almost surely have a

Americans have been treated historically. One text (Grade 4) even describes as "idealistic" the U.S. belief that westward expansion would help "bring freedom" to the "less fortunate" Indians and Mexicans.

The use of "dreams" serves a similar purpose, as in statements like "The forty-niners had dreams of becoming very wealthy," which we find in the teacher's edition for Grade 4. Such descriptions tend to make young readers identify with men who in fact often robbed, raped and murdered people of color. The text goes on to say of the forty-niners that "they did not feel they had to share those dreams with Indians," a remarkably mild way of describing their actual deeds.

Eurocentric usage of "beliefs," "idealism" and "dreams"—all concepts that many youths embrace—can work wonders. We see this in the series' treatment of three crucial events: westward expansion and the takeover of Texas, the U.S. war on Mexico and the Gold Rush, and Mexican resistance to the U.S. takeover.

I. Westward Expansion and Taking Texas

"United States expansion in the West was inevitable," says the fourth-grade text. One section, "Texas and the Struggle with Mexico" (Grade 5), describes how Anglos obtained land and settled in Texas with Mexico's permission on certain conditions, including that they wanted no slaves and were Catholic. When they broke their promises and Mexico tried to tighten its control, the Americans in Texas "were upset ... [because] Mexican rule ... had become too strict." Being "upset"—a variation on "belief"—apparently legitimizes the Anglo move to take Texas.

The Battle of the Alamo at San Antonio, Texas, in 1836 is the one event involving Mexicans that appeared in every textbook submitted for consideration in California. This Mexican military victory, in which all Anglo fighters died defending the fort—or, some scholars say, were executed—sparked a legendary desire for revenge. The Grade 5 teacher's edition emphasizes that students should see the Battle of the Alamo as "an important symbol of freedom and liberty" where "heroes" fought for Texas independence. From a different perspective, it was a symbol of U.S. land grabbing in which the "heroes" featured an escaped murderer (William Travis), a slave runner (James Bowie) and a gunfighting adventurer (Davy Crockett). But that perspective doesn't appear.

Holt, Rinehart & Winston's eighth-grade book tells how, after losing the Alamo battle, the United States surprise-attacked Mexico at San Jacinto. Confronted by the revenge-hungry Anglos, the Mexican troops "fearfully" called out, "Me no Alamo!" supposedly in hopes of being spared. "In fact," the book says, "these were the very same men

who had slaughtered the defenders of the mission." Thus Holt encourages the stereotypes of Mexicans as cowardly, murderous, sneaky, lying buffoons who cannot, of course, outwit the brave, righteous Anglo.

II. The 1846-48 U.S. War on Mexico and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

This sequence of events must rank among the most inaccurately depicted history in all U.S. schoolbooks. "Belief" strikes again in the Grade 4 text from Houghton Mifflin, which bluntly states: "In the 1840s many [U.S.] people believed that their nation should rule all the land between the East and West coasts. Mexico owned much of this land. So the United States decided to go to war with Mexico to try to win this land."

More detail comes in Grade 5: "Mexican officials refused to talk" (that word "talk"—which sounds like little enough to ask—actually meant negotiating with the United States over its demands for more Mexican land), so "President Polk ordered American forces to move down to the Rio Grande. They were now in territory that the Mexican government said was theirs. In April 1846 Mexican troops fought with an American scouting party, leaving 16 dead or wounded. The United States and Mexico were now at war." A teacher's edition section on critical thinking says: "No one really wanted the Mexican War. How could it have been avoided?"

This is a disingenuous, indeed deceptive, version of what even Anglo historians have identified as Polk's deliberate provocation of war with a view to seizing half of Mexico. Polk declared his intent in his own diary, but the Houghton Mifflin text remains silent on that. We also find not one word about the infamous atrocities committed by U.S. invading forces during the war or the fact that General Ulysses S. Grant and other Americans denounced the war. In some apparent gesture to objectivity, the Grade 4 text says about the war in California, "In these battles [Mexican] soldiers fought brilliantly. Stephen W. Kearney, a general in the United States Army, admired their horseback riding." Given the failure to identify the invasion of Mexico as naked expansionism, such compliments are patronizing *tr. via.*

The war officially ended with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which, the text states, provided that "as citizens, the Californios would have the same rights as other United States citizens." There's no mention that this treaty has been grossly violated from the time of signing. The civil and property rights of Mexicans have not been respected as promised by the United States. The land-holding rights guaranteed in a Statement of Protocol accompanying the treaty at the Mexican government's insistence have been ignored.

By Grade 8, the textbook does say that Polk deliberately "provoked" the war and that the treaty was "often not enforced." But at this late stage a few facts about what the United States really did are unlikely to reverse years of conditioning students to identify with this nation's policies, no matter how murderous.

III. The Gold Rush and the U.S. Occupation

The Houghton Mifflin series sanitizes some events and demonizes others. Its treatment of the Gold Rush is wondrous: "Besides the gold they found, what did the forty-niners contribute to California?" The teacher's edition answers, "They contributed the skills, energy, and population increase that would help California grow." One wants to add: not to mention driving out or killing Mexicans and Indians so that California had a white instead of a Mexican majority and could become a state. And what about the crucial skills that Anglos learned from the indigenous peoples, beginning with mining technology? Not to mention that gold was first discovered in California by a Mexican shepherd, Francisco Lopez Arballo, in 1842. But we hear only about James Marshall in 1848.

Resistance to the U.S. occupation is transformed into sheer criminality: "'Joaquin!' they gasped. No one felt safe.... Who was this Mexican bandit?" Actually, Anglo miners drove Joaquin Murieta out of the goldfields (like other Latino miners) after reportedly raping his wife; as a result, he began a guerrilla-like movement that enjoyed widespread support. Many Mexican people saw him as a resistance hero, but both the Houghton Mifflin book and the text from Holt, Rinehart & Winston call such fighters "bandits."

Confronted by textbooks like these, some California teachers have made special efforts to present the Mexican-American or Latino perspective with other materials. One San Francisco teacher in a largely Latino neighborhood has created a special curriculum around the theme of Manifest Destiny, and another makes minimal use of the adopted textbook at her school. Let's hope many more are taking such corrective steps.

What is the larger, long-range solution? During the textbook battle, Sylvia Wynter, then a Stanford University professor of Spanish, Portuguese, and Black Studies circulated a provocative position paper. The textbooks present a dual problem, Wynter observed. First, they are dominated by a Eurocentric perspective. Second, this perspective is not acknowledged but is camouflaged by a "multiculturalist alternative." The supposed alternative remains entrapped by an assumption that the United States is integrated as a nation on the basis of a single, Euro-American culture. Thus the "multiculturalist alternative" seeks to save the Euro-American nation model by multicultural-