

Kyle Ward. *History in the Making: An Absorbing Look at How American History Has Changed in the Telling over the Last 200 Years*. New York: New Press, 2006. 374 pp.

Robert Shaffer

During my first year teaching high school social studies, 20 years ago, one of my most successful assignments was to have students compare the treatment of Andrew Jackson in different editions of the same textbook, Lewis Paul Todd's and Merle Curti's *The Rise of the American Nation*. Students quickly noted that the 1966 edition portrayed Jackson squarely as a man of the people, with virtually no mention of his pro-slavery and anti-Indian policies, while the 1977 edition provided a more multi-sided view. Under questioning, many students could articulate why historians might change their views of the past, and how such changes in "history" both reflect and create changes in how we see our society. In this instance, students could readily see the impact of the civil rights movements in helping to create a more inclusive, and more critical, history.

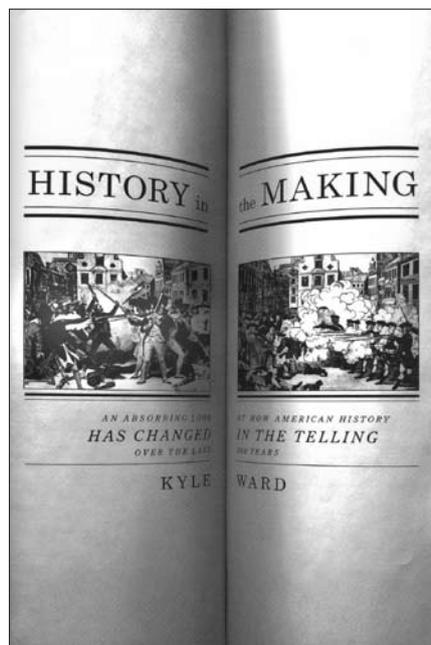
So I was excited to hear about *History in the Making*, a book that applies on a much broader scale my little comparison. Compiler Kyle Ward has read dozens of U.S. history textbooks, dating from 1794 to 1999, and has juxtaposed a few paragraphs on a single topic from several textbooks, so readers may see how the language, interpretations, and concerns have changed over the years. Thus, we have seven accounts of the Boston massacre, arranged chronologically from 1823 to 1996. These include an 1855 account which invented dialogue for the historical actors to create a smooth narrative flow, and an 1866 account—just as the Civil War ended—which was the first to record the name of the "gigantic negro," Crispus Attacks, who led the crowd and suffered a martyr's death.

There are 50 such chapters, extending in time from "Native American Relations with the New Settlers" to "The Reagan Revolution." Ward includes broad topics such as "African Americans and Reconstruction," and specific ones, such as "Truman Fires MacArthur" and "Anne Hutchinson." He includes topics that only began to receive much coverage years after they occurred, such as "Japanese Internment," and topics that used to figure more prominently in textbooks than they do

now, such as the influence of French Huguenots in the settlement of colonial St. Augustine. Ward contributes a brief introduction for each chapter, providing the overall context for the events and themes that they raise, and a briefer note on each textbook excerpt, alerting the reader to ideas to look for, or noting how the date of the account might have influenced its telling.

The result will interest all social studies teachers. *History in the Making* easily lends itself to classroom activities at all levels, as the excerpts can be examined in class. Middle school and Advanced Placement students alike will profit from the contrasting accounts—some glaringly evident, some quite nuanced—that Ward presents. Indeed, Ward's 2004 book, *History Lessons: How Textbooks from Around the World Portray U.S. History*, co-edited with Dana Lindaman, has already provided classroom teachers with the opportunity to have students analyze how authors' and societies' viewpoints affect the writing of history.¹

Among the best topics for analysis by students will be those on the Mexican War, the World War I Espionage Act, and the Tonkin Gulf incident. In each case, the earlier textbooks accept U.S. actions as justified, or as presented by officials, while recent textbooks adopt a more critical attitude. Chapters on Anne Hutchinson and on the Mormons also clearly show change over time, although in less predictable ways, and thus will be great for classroom use. An 1830 account celebrates Hutchinson's popularity, while an 1874 account attributes her banishment to political conflict among Massachusetts's male leaders. A 1944 account—the time of Franklin Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms"—portrays Hutchinson as an advocate of religious liberty, while a 1995 account sees her as an early model for feminism. The 1866 account of the Mormons is openly contemptuous of the group, while the 1897 account is more positive. Ward neglects to mention here that Utah had become a state in 1896, and students could be encouraged to speculate on how that event might have influenced textbook coverage.



Two other gems that Ward unearthed must also be mentioned. An 1849 textbook account of the Cherokee removal, unlike so much early coverage of American Indians as “savages,” labeled this group “civilized” and clearly sympathized with them over President Jackson. A 1912 account of the Salem “witchcraft” persecution also has a decidedly modern cast, attributing the “witchcraft troubles” in part to “dangers from Indian attacks that impended about the year 1691” (p. 67). Historian Mary Beth Norton recently published a book developing this thesis, but her 1994 textbook, *A People and a Nation*, excerpted here, did not mention this cause.²

Unfortunately, *History in the Making* also has significant problems, which limit its usefulness. Ward’s grammar is appalling, which sets a bad example for student readers, and raises questions about whether the transcriptions of the textbooks are accurate. Indeed, there are clearly words missing in an excerpt on the Social Security Act, and the introduction to an excerpt on Sherman’s march makes little sense, probably due to awkward prose.

More importantly, many of Ward’s comments on the excerpts are questionable. For example, Ward states in a chapter on Jimmy Carter and the Camp David Accords that Carter “continues to get trounced in U.S. history textbooks” (p. 334), but neither of the excerpts presented sustain this judgment. The introduction to an 1830 textbook account of Anne Hutchinson asserts that “the only students allowed to read this passage in the 1830s would have been the sons of wealthy white Americans” (p. 58), ignoring the common schools open to students of different backgrounds and both genders in New England and in the Midwest. Ward asserts (p. 234) that topics such as “The Seneca Falls Movement” did not show up in textbooks until the 1970s, but two pages later his book features an excerpt on this topic from 1961.

Ward often fails to provide adequate

contextual information about the textbooks or the time period which a casual reader or student might not be aware of, and which would strengthen the analysis. Thus, Ward might discuss the antagonism between Whigs and Democrats in the age of Jackson, and the prominence of Whigs in teaching and publishing, as background for the sympathetic attitude toward Cherokees expressed in that 1849 textbook. Nor does Ward note in his introduction that two passages he presents on the Espionage Act of 1917, one from 1920 and one from 1948, were both written by David Muzzey. Noting that juxtaposition would have allowed Ward to comment on changes in interpretations between these years, and to have readers consider whether Muzzey was guilty of writing what his critics called “treason texts.”³

Ward’s superficial commentary stems, perhaps, from a broader drawback of all but ignoring current scholarship on the development of U.S. history textbooks. In his woefully inadequate overall introduction, the most recent reference on this subject is to Frances FitzGerald’s 1979 *America Revised: History Schoolbooks in the Twentieth Century*. Pathbreaking as that book was, it is hardly definitive, and more recent work by Gary Nash and the National Center for History in the Schools, among others, has correctly emphasized the long history of battles over how U.S. history is presented in textbooks.⁴ A serious introduction would have provided stronger context for those reading the textbook excerpts, and might also have led Ward to choose topics and excerpts more carefully, to highlight important points. For example, Ward includes excerpts from textbooks co-authored by Charles Beard, but provides no indication of Beard’s contentious economic interpretation of the adoption of the Constitution.

Ward also indiscriminately mixes textbooks produced for secondary schools with those produced for college-level survey classes, thereby less-

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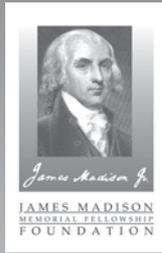
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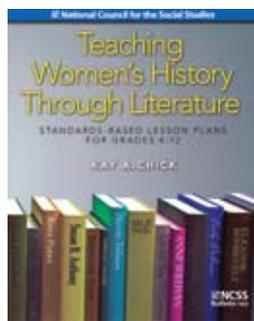
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ening the analytical value in comparing similarities and differences over time. Thus, the highly critical 1982 account of repression under the Espionage Act, from Norton's college-level *A People and a Nation* may not be representative of recent textbooks aimed at secondary students. Finally, some will question Ward's choice of topics for inclusion or omission. For example, he does not cover the Declaration of Independence, the adoption of the Constitution, or the partisan conflicts of the 1790s.

Despite its problems, all teachers of American history will find much worthwhile material in *History in the Making*, and chapters and excerpts have most likely already been showing up in classrooms across the country. Anyone who has struggled to find passages of comparable length but varying perspectives on a given topic will appreciate the work Ward has produced, and for that we are in his debt. By providing dramatic examples of how the presentation of U.S. history has changed in our textbooks, *History in the Making* should help us motivate students to consider

the larger meanings of history, and it will help students and teachers alike better understand ourselves as well as our past. 

Notes

1. John DeRose, "Comparing International Textbooks to Develop Historical Thinking," *Social Education* 71, no. 1 (2007): 36-39.
2. Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002). The 2004 edition of Norton's *A People and a Nation* does note the Indian wars as background.
3. See Gary Nash, Ross Dunn, and Charlotte Crabtree, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 26-29.
4. Nash et al, *History on Trial*; Jonathan Zimmerman, *Whose America? Culture Wars in the Public Schools* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Joseph Moreau, *Schoolbook Nation: Conflicts Over American History Textbooks from the Civil War to the Present* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003); James Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York: New Press, 1995).

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