

A Current Analysis of the Treatment of Japanese Americans and Internment in United States History Textbooks

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Many secondary social studies teachers persist in using United States history textbooks as their primary, and in many cases, only instructional tool (Stevens, 1988, Paxton, 2002, & Hawkins, 2005). Because of this it is vital that teachers have up-to-date, accurate, and true-to-life textbooks for instruction. This article will address the topic of the treatment of Japanese Americans and their internment in World War II (WWII), as it has been presented in recent United States history textbooks (2005-2008), and suggest how the content should be updated and expanded.

State standards require the study of WWII--key events and their causes and effects, and certain standards include internment policies and their effects as well. This allows students to “confront today’s problems and choices with a deeper awareness of their alternatives and the likely consequences” (OK PASS, 2010). Although “students still tend to be passive recipients of the knowledge handed down by teachers, the curriculum, and textbooks, rather than active seekers of problems to be solved,” (Simanu-Klutz, 2006, p. 1) this remains a worthy goal.

Previous Textbook Analyses

In 1995, Romanowski examined the treatment of Japanese American internment during WW II, in United States history textbooks published between 1988 and 1992. This study found that most of the textbooks failed to provide students with complete descriptions of the internment camps, adequately address the loss of personal property, hypothesize a variety of possible motives for the internment, problematize the government’s role in ordering and carrying out the internment, present the topic of restitution made to Japanese Americans, or raise the issue of

whether or not the United States government actions were democratic.

In 2000, Harada looked at the treatment of Asian Americans in United States history textbooks published between 1994 and 1996. This study stated that “Asian” Americans were depicted in textbooks as passive rather than active agents, as a group successfully assimilated into the mainstream culture, and as a model minority.

In 2004, Ogawa indicated that textbooks adopted for use in Idaho schools in 2002 had improved since the Romanowski and Harada studies, but still lacked an explanation of other possible motives for internment, such as ethnocentrism, discrimination, and racism (one of Romanowski’s proposed additions to the textbooks). Most textbooks also excluded information about the different historic and economic situations faced by Japanese Americans living on the mainland and in Hawaii. Ogawa stated that the textbooks also failed to address the fact that more acts of violence and terrorism were committed against Japanese Americans at the end of WWII than at the beginning. Could such acts have been the cause of “Asian” American assimilation and the evolution of Asians as a model minority (as Harada proposed)?

Ogawa further stated that additional information was necessary for students to understand the reasons why discrimination toward Japanese Americans did not end after the war and why American citizens of German and Italian ancestries were not put into internment camps. In addition, some textbooks lacked personal accounts of the internment to help students develop empathy for those interned. Finally, and most importantly, Ogawa argued that textbooks failed to develop students’ critical thinking skills and critical knowledge of United States history, and that teachers needed to go

beyond their reliance on textbooks for both instructional methods and content material.

Current Study

This study updated and expanded upon the conclusions reached by Romanowski (1995), Harada (2000), and Ogawa (2004) regarding the treatment of Japanese Americans and internment in United States history textbooks. The researchers used the same criteria for content analysis and the same ten history textbooks studied previously. However, they used the more recent editions of those texts, published between 2005 and 2008. Researchers read, coded, and analyzed sections of the textbooks that pertained to Japanese Americans and internment during the WWII era. In addition, they addressed the extent to which the textbooks followed the recommendations, considerations, and conclusions of prior studies. The content analysis took place during the summer of 2009.

Brief Historical Commentary

WWII is generally considered to be a time of galvanizing national identity and voluntary unity, in contrast with the coercion and intimidation that mobilized the troops during WWI. Yet, this was not the case with the Japanese Americans who lived in the United States during this decade (Census, 1940, & Smithsonian National Museum of History, 2007).

What caused the stark backlash against the Japanese American population was, of course, the attack on Pearl Harbor. In November of 1941, the Munson Report was submitted before Congress. It was a fact-finding report intent upon gauging the character of America's citizens of Japanese descent. The report found that the Nisei population, second generation Japanese born in the United States, were loyal Americans

who longed for acceptance in a society that regarded them as second-class citizens. The report claimed that there was little to fear from Asian citizens if a conflict would break out between the United States and the Empire of Japan (Brokaw, 1998, Evans, 1998, Riley, 2002, Bennett, 2007, & Smithsonian National Museum of History, 2007).

None of this information was taken into consideration following the attack on Pearl Harbor. Emotions and national indignation ran too high. While America's entry into the war served as a rallying point to assimilate and cement several disparate ethnic groups firmly into American society, it had the opposite effect on the Nisei and their non-citizen parents, the Issei.

In February of 1942, a scant two months after the attack of Pearl Harbor, President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, calling for all Japanese American citizens and non-citizens along the West coast to be evacuated from their homes and businesses. The rationale for this was that the public outcry and negative sentiment against Asians within the borders of the United States could erupt into violence and rioting. There were already signs of this negativity as banks refused to cash checks written by Nisei citizens and insurance companies canceled their policies. Many milkmen and grocers refused to deliver their goods or sell to them. Buddhist temples were vandalized and ransacked. The writing of racism and prejudice was on the wall, and the argument was made that something needed to be done to maintain order (Ibid.).

This history is not necessarily included in current United States history textbooks, nor was it mentioned in prior content analysis research by Romanowski (1995), Harada (2000), or Ogawa (2004).

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this study was to update and further develop our knowledge of what has been included, overlooked, or added to the most recent United States history textbooks (2005-2008) regarding the treatment of Japanese Americans and the experience of internment.

American Anthem, published in 2007 by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, offered two fairly comprehensive, though condensed chapters dealing with WWI. Of the 76 pages dedicated to the war, 2 dealt with the Japanese American internment. Content included generalized and standard recitations of camp locations, privations, and the loss of property, as well as the case of *Korematsu v. United States*. This finding parallels previous studies. The text was also helpful in identifying the often overlooked fact that thousands of Italian and German immigrants were forced to carry identification cards, a clear differentiation in treatment from that of the Japanese Americans. The text mentioned General John L. DeWitt, Commander of West coast Defenses, who was the primary agitator of anti-Japanese sentiment on the West coast, although it did not bring up his racist and inflammatory rhetoric. Loyalty questionnaires were mentioned, as was the combat record of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team (RCT). Interestingly, there was also a photo of Fred Korematsu receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Clinton in 1998.

The Enduring Vision, A History of the American People, published in 2005 by Houghton Mifflin, was less impressive. The entire period from 1933 to 1945 was presented in only 31 pages. Curiously, there was a paragraph pertaining to the cultural treatment of homosexuals in the United States during WWII placed immediately before the section covering the Japanese

American internment, and it was not connected with other historical events. The researchers did not see such passages in other textbooks, and supposed it might be an attempt to portray diversity, however out of context. Here, General DeWitt's racist comments, "A Jap is a Jap. It makes not difference whether he is an American citizen or not . . . I don't want any of them here" (p. 805) were stated, but without any identification of their author. Also, vague references to *Korematsu v. United States* were noted. And the entire coverage of internment was discussed in less than a full page.

The American Journey, published in 2007 by Prentice Hall, took a slightly different, yet interesting introductory approach to the topic. As a precursor to discussing the internment, a section on the clashing of cultures featured the ethnic and racial tensions that exuded across America toward all minorities. Race riots in Harlem and Detroit between blacks and whites, plus the infamous "Zoot Suit Riots" between white servicemen and Chicano "zoot suiters" in Los Angeles were specifically noted. These textbook authors seemingly followed the suggestions of Romanowski and Ogawa in including this content.

In the handling of the internment itself, the textbook provided the different perspectives of the Issei and Nisei, speculated as to why the army waited months after Pearl Harbor to begin evacuation, and made observations about racial stereotyping. There was also a two-page, first person narrative from former Camp Harmony internee, Monica Itoi Stone, which expressed a sense of immediacy and provided an opportunity for empathy on the part of the reader. However, coverage of other aspects of internment lacked inclusiveness. Comparisons between Japanese American, German American, and

Italian American detainment were present, but little else. While Monica's personal recollections took up two pages, the coverage of pertinent facts concerning the internment took up only one page.

A People and A Nation, published in 2005 by Houghton Mifflin, was among the worst of the textbooks. Coverage of the internment was relegated to little more than one-half of a page. One paragraph dealt with the Alien Registration Act of 1940, and it served as an example of the prevalent and increased sense of paranoia towards immigrant populations. Descriptions were perfunctory. All that stood out was a brief mention of the 6,000 internees who renounced their citizenship and were repatriated to Japan, followed by a contrasting paragraph covering the 442nd RCT combat record.

United States History, Modern America, published in 2008 by Prentice Hall, fared little better in its analysis. Coverage of the internment amounted to less than one-half of a page. However, this textbook chose to focus more on the challenges to civil liberties during wartime, which supported a comparison between WWII and today's War on Terror. Photographs of Nisei families wearing identification tags and waiting at evacuation centers and the Manzanar camp would prove useful to students, though a glaring error stood out. A photograph featuring the arrest of Japanese Ambassador Morito Moishima was incorrectly labeled as the arrest of a Japanese American citizen.

The American Promise, A History of the United States, published in 2007 by St. Martin's Press, proved to be a fairly effective text on many levels. The introduction to the internment came in the context of heightened anxieties and panic after German U-Boats attacked shipping off the East coast. This section moved directly into the topic of racial xenophobia directed

at Japanese Americans from excessive fears of espionage, subversion, and sabotage against American industry.

The passages detailing the internment directly were very informative, offering excerpts from the memoranda issued by General DeWitt to the Secretary of War, plus first person memoirs from internee Kazue Yamane and the diaries of Charles Kikuchi. DeWitt's paranoia, decrying Japanese Americans as "subversives" was made manifest in this memorandum, despite the evidence to the contrary supplied by the Munson Report.

Yamane's memoirs, looking back forty years, denote the bitterness many Nisei still felt over the degradation of the internment. The fascinating example of the Kikuchi diary (showcased in the Harada study) as excerpted in this textbook in particular, passionately demonstrated the desire for acceptance by mainstream America on the part of Japanese Americans, and their overall rejection and ignorance of the Imperial Japanese militaristic tradition.

Out of Many, A History of the American People, published in 2007 by Prentice Hall, provided mediocre coverage of the treatment of Japanese Americans and the internment. While the text itself provided a relatively wide range of coverage of racial issues from the treatment of segregated black troops to the Latino "zoot suit" riots of 1943 in Los Angeles, it relegated the plight of the Nisei to a single page. One photo of a family wearing tags and holding their suitcases was present. The best and only coverage of note lay in examples of racial stereotyping exemplified in such songs as, "You're a Sap, Mister Jap," and "Make a Yankee Cranky." Also observable, and previously noted by Romanowski and Ogawa, were the paradoxes of military logic, as in the following example, "The very fact that no sabotage has taken place to date is a

disturbing and confirming indication that action will be taken” (p. 900).

As far as general overall coverage of WWII, the researchers found *America, Pathways to the Present*, published in 2007 by Pearson Prentice Hall, to be the most comprehensive. However, one glaring error was noted. A photograph of a U. S. Army uniform worn during the Cold War era was presented in the discussion of a different time period. Over 77 pages were devoted to covering WWII from all perspectives, albeit in a condensed format. Overviews of events leading to the outbreak of global conflict from the Spanish Civil War to the rise of Japanese militarism and atrocities in China and Korea were all present within this text. Likewise, the details of maps covered key locations, such as Pearl Harbor, and even the percentage of ships damaged during the sneak attack. At the end of each chapter was a section dedicated to standardized test preparation.

While only a page and a half was given to the internment, the global coverage of concurrent events was sufficient to enable students to think critically about why the internment happened in the first place. Included were recollections of the inflammatory and inaccurate newspaper reports of Japanese sabotage plans and thefts of the property and livelihoods of the Japanese Americans. The internment camps were undeniably harsh and citizens forced to live there endured any number of privations. Their barracks accommodations could be compared to military camps. And the wide range of perspectives offered in this text enabled the expansion of students’ critical thinking skills (e.g., cause and effect, scope of the conflict, and intended and unintended consequences of these events upon various populations, etc.).

Of the ten textbooks, McDougal Littell’s 2007, *The Americans, Reconstruction to the*

21st Century, provided the most comprehensive coverage of the internment camp experience. Of the four pages addressing this, two of them were devoted solely to *Korematsu v. United States*. This textbook appeared to be quite an extensive text, featuring mini-biographies of several key but typically overlooked figures of the war years, such as journalist Martha Gelhorn. It also quite effectively covered the contributions of not just Japanese Americans, but all minorities.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study confirmed earlier research findings by Romanowski (1995), Harada (2000), and Ogawa (2004). It also found that the most recent United States history textbooks continued to improve their depiction of the treatment of Japanese Americans and their internment. Most of the textbooks in the 1995 study failed to provide adequate narratives concerning the loss of individual’s personal property and the government’s motives for the internment. The government’s role in the internment, its restitution to Japanese Americans, and its application of democratic ideals were issues questioned in the Romanowski study. The current study found considerable improvement in these areas.

In addition, the current study found, as did the 2000 study, that Asians were presented as passive, successfully assimilated, and ultimately a model minority. However, these views were now contextualized through a more diverse lense. Some textbooks promoted critical inquiry via the study of civil rights or histories of discrimination that applied to not only Japanese Americans, but to other minorities as well. As mentioned previously, these aspects of the issues were either not addressed or presented as tokenism in earlier textbooks. The newer editions of the

textbooks added primary sources (i.e., personal accounts from Japanese Americans and others) that allowed for a more effective exploration of the issues by students.

Ogawa (2004) found that textbooks lacked content about other possible motives for internment (beyond the idea of avoiding conflict related to a possible war with Japan). Additional concerns about content to be included in the textbook revolved around the different situations faced by Japanese Americans living on the mainland and in Hawaii, the reasons why German and Italian Americans were not interned, the personal accounts of internment, and the goals for developing students' critical knowledge of the historical events and the application of critical thinking skills to the study of these events. The current study found considerable improvement in these areas in all ten United States history textbooks.

The researchers join earlier authors in recommending that United States history textbooks include a complete and clear description of and delineation between internment, relocation, and concentration camps. All ten current textbooks describe internment in some way. However considering the atrocities committed by the American government toward Japanese Americans, we believe that a complete narrative should be included in future textbooks that clearly differentiates these concepts. Finally, some current textbooks did address different historical and economic situations faced by Japanese Americans living on the mainland as recommended by Ogawa (2004). However, in the current study, we found nothing mentioned about those living in Hawaii. In addition as in earlier research, acts of violence and terrorism committed against Japanese Americans at the end of WWI

were not mentioned in any textbook in the current study. Also, current textbooks still ignored the question raised by Ogawa in 2004, "Why were there no internment camps in Hawaii?"

In conclusion, the researchers invite you to review an excerpt from *The American Pageant* (2006) and answer, "Is this an adequate or inadequate history? What do you think?" These events changed the lives of some 110,000 Japanese Americans concentrated on the Pacific Coast, and they claim a prominent place in our country's history.

"The Washington top command, fearing that they might act as saboteurs for Japan in case of invasion, forcibly herded them together in concentrations camps, though about two-thirds of them were American-born U.S. citizens. This brutal precaution was both unnecessary and unfair, as the loyalty and combat record of Japanese Americans proved to be admirable. But a wave of post-Pearl Harbor hysteria backed by the long historical swell of anti-Japanese prejudice on the West coast, temporarily robbed many Americans of their good sense—and their sense of justice. The internment camps deprived these uprooted Americans of dignity and basic rights; the internees also lost hundreds of millions of dollars in property and forgone earnings. The wartime Supreme Court in 1944 upheld the constitutionality of the Japanese relocation in *Korematsu v. United States*. But more than four decades later, in 1988, the U.S. government officially apologized for its actions and approved the payment of reparations of \$20,000 to each camp survivor" (p. 823).

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