

Joseph Morera, Schoolbook Nation: Conflicts over American History Textbooks from the Civil War to the Present (Ann Arbor: UMich Press, 2003)

educators wished to apply to it. But the professors who thought of themselves as "seekers after truth" and "gentle purveyors of information" had a point, and they rightly feared, as long-term consequences for textbook publishing and teaching in the schools. More than any other episode of the twentieth century, the alleged British conspiracy and the Scopes case determined how modern textbooks would be planned, written, edited, and marketed to schools. The 1920s accelerated the development of "managed texts" in history, biology, and other subjects. Political calculation by publishers, as much as the expertise of scholars and scientists, began to exert ever greater control over the presentation of potentially contentious issues, from primate evolution to the nature of America's revolt against Great Britain.

The 1920s left a bitter taste in the mouths of many historians. The writer of one popular American history told a researcher that resisting the "sins of omission and commission" was now impossible: "And, if any author tells you he's not influenced by such pressure, that he tells 'the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth' as far as he knows it, don't you believe him. He is a conscious or unconscious liar." James Harvey Robinson, a prominent scholar and for many years history advisor for Ginn and Company's textbook department, understood the dilemma well. In the 1920s Robinson remarked, "No publishers of text-books for the schools would venture to permit a writer to give children the best and most authoritative knowledge that we have today."⁸⁵

Yet soon after he uttered these words, one publisher was allowing a writer to try to do just that. And the publisher was Ginn.

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6. Harold Rugg vs. Horatio Alger Social Class and Economic Opportunity, 1930-1960

At the start of 1939, Harold Rugg was the most widely read author of social science textbooks in the United States. In the decade since he finished the first full-length volume in the *Man and His Changing Society* series, his publisher, Ginn and Company, had shipped more than five million of his texts and workbooks, reaching students in approximately five thousand school systems.¹ Rugg's frankness, left-of-center politics, and underlying optimism about America's destiny struck a chord with a country devastated by the Depression. As a delighted Midwestern sales agent for Ginn put it, "Everybody wanted the Rugg books."²

But within months, Rugg became the subject of the most celebrated case of censorship in the nation's history. After critics accused him of corrupting youth with subversive, even communist, propaganda, this education professor at Columbia University's Teachers College watched his reputation and the sales of his books plummet. By 1951 Rugg's fortunes had changed irrevocably. His texts, long since removed from the classrooms of public schools, gathered dust in storage basements and library shelves. Nearing retirement, he prepared to give an address at Ohio State University, only to have the American Legion mount a vigorous protest and successfully pressure school authorities to impose a gag rule to block appearances by "disloyal" speakers. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of the university's students had once cradled Rugg's books in their arms. Now, it seemed, his ideas were simply too radical for them to consider as adults.³

What led to Rugg's undoing? Was he a would-be revolutionary foiled by the Legion and a host of other critics or, as many of his sup-

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porters continue to claim, the hapless victim of a right-wing conspiracy? Neither depiction captures the real spirit of this progressive educator, though there are elements of truth in both. Rugg is best understood as a dedicated social critic and teacher who, with like-minded educators, dreamed of using schools to reform American society. His particular interest was the social studies curriculum, and his tools for civic betterment included a series of texts for elementary and junior high school students. What brought these books acclaim in educational circles for most of the 1930s, and infamy among conservatives soon afterward, was their author's willingness to touch on a usually taboo topic.

Until the 1930s, social class had been one of the most sensitive issues in textbooks on U.S. history. Acknowledging that there had long been stark disparities of income and wealth among Americans was awkward enough for writers. Explaining how those differences had inspired competing economic philosophies and political programs was even more treacherous. Throughout much of the nineteenth century, and into the first decades of the twentieth, civic groups and politicians demanded that textbook authors promote national unity and encourage patriotism among young readers. But nationalism, as one scholar has put it, is animated by the conviction that all citizens share a "deep, horizontal comradeship."⁴ Social inequality and economic exploitation ran counter to that national myth, and so, not surprisingly, many of the men and women who drafted books destined for the nation's classrooms tried to avoid these subjects. Once professional historians began to replace amateurs in the textbook-writing trade, however, they found that such self-censorship clashed with their own dedication to objectivity. Led by David Saville Muzzey in the 1910s and 1920s, they slowly and cautiously began to address the role of class in the country's past.

Rugg chose to explore class even more assiduously. Personal temperament guided that decision, but so did academic training. Rugg was not a professional historian, and he was not guided by the disciplinary ideal of objectivity—of rendering the past dispassionately, just as it had happened. He was a scholar of education committed to progressive ideas and methods. While some of his fellow textbook authors were willing to discuss contentious issues as they arose naturally in their narratives, Rugg actually built his books around them. As a progressive educator, he hoped that a focus on unresolved social issues would make schoolwork individually and socially relevant for students and thereby more compelling. He began the writing process for *Man and His Changing Society* by identifying the most important problems

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he believed young Americans would face as adults and then tried to explain how these problems had arisen and how they might be solved in the future.

The persistence of material inequality in America especially interested Rugg. Like his fellow writers, he praised the nation's record of economic accomplishment. But unlike many of his predecessors, he delved into murkier topics—the pernicious influence of money in politics; the class bias of revered statesmen; and, most noticeably, the apparent failure of *laissez-faire* economics, which had, at the time his books rolled off the presses during the Depression's worst years, produced millions of destitute farmers and industrial laborers along with a handful of those he termed the "idle rich." Rugg's heroes were middle- and working-class Americans who endured hardship as they struggled to reform and perfect their society, a theme suggested by the title of one of his books, *America's March toward Democracy*. Rugg's focus on everyday people made the texts especially readable. They had an appeal akin to John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* and photographer Dorothea Lange's sympathetic portraits of migrant laborers.

The texts were so popular that Rugg became a convenient target as political winds began to shift at the end of the 1930s. For his discussion of poverty and claims that some sort of national economic planning would be needed to prevent another collapse, critics branded him un-American. A few suggested that he and other progressive "REDUCATORS" were doing Moscow's bidding. The critics included familiar faces from the 1920s battles, including the American Legion and the Daughters of the American Revolution. But powerful corporate interests also joined these groups, arguing that Rugg's emphasis on the defects of industrial capitalism would sow disorder and weaken children's commitment to free enterprise. Well funded and guided by fervent leaders, the campaign routed Rugg from the schools. By 1944, sales of his books had dropped 90 percent from their peak in the late 1930s.⁵

The story did not end there, however. Like earlier textbook battles, Rugg's ordeal helped to define the acceptable limits of discourse in America's public schools. The successful attacks on *Man and His Changing Society* spurred publishers to release books in the 1940s and 1950s with far more glowing images of the United States and its pageant of economic progress. Class conflict as a factor in American history grew more muted in postwar texts, and poverty—what was shown of it—was safely relegated to the past. Students saw a present-day America united across class lines, and sometimes one that appeared entirely middle-class in make-up.

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When he began writing for schools, Rugg very intentionally inserted himself into a long-standing, often bitter feud about how Americans should conceive of themselves as a national community. In one camp were liberal nationalists, "liberal" being used here in its nineteenth-century, European sense, not in its modern American one. As liberals, they championed political freedom, property rights, and free markets. As nationalists, they saw Americans united by a devotion to liberal philosophy, particularly individualism and the conviction that all citizens had essentially equal opportunity to exploit their liberties for economic gain. American liberals were the heirs of Abraham Lincoln, their most eloquent advocate.

Aspiring to national office in the 1850s, Lincoln had confronted slaveholders who argued that the peculiar institution was relatively benign. It was far better for the slaves, they claimed, than the industrializing economy of the North was for White workers, who were forced into dead-end poverty with none of the security for old age or sickness that slavery provided. Rebuking the slaveholders, Lincoln sketched out a hopeful, and very liberal, picture of national progress, one illustrated by his own rise from poor backwoods farmer to congressman. Relations between capital and labor were fluid in the North, he argued, and workers were not fixed into any position for life. "Many independent men . . . a few years ago were hired laborers," he told a Wisconsin audience in 1859. Their cases supported the general rule:

The prudent, penniless beginner in the world labors for wages a while, saves a surplus with which to buy tools or land, for himself; then labors on his own account another while, and at length hires another new beginner to help him. This . . . is free labor—the just and generous, and prosperous system, which opens the way for all—gives hope to all, and energy, and progress, and improvement of condition to all. If any continue through life in the condition of the hired laborer, it is not the fault of the system, but because of either a dependent nature which prefers it, or improvidence, folly, or singular misfortune.⁶

In a flexible economy anchored by both farming and industry, an enterprising laborer could always go into business for himself or purchase good soil out West, declared Lincoln. No "fault of the system" condemned one man to groveling subservience under another, only poor planning, foolishness, or extraordinarily bad luck. Steering clear of those, the hard-working individual could not only substantially bet-

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ter himself but, in so doing, improve "the condition of all" in the nation.

Because liberals believed unfettered capitalism was fundamentally sound, they saw a very limited role for the state in the economy, at least in principle. Beyond securing the rights of property, one of its few duties was to provide public education, which would prepare citizens for productive work and propel the wheel of social mobility. Additional state intervention in the economy could be justified only when it served a higher, *national* purpose. Liberals could therefore support tariffs because, they reasoned, protection of industry benefited the growth of the American economy and thus the country at large. They opposed legislation recognizing the right of workers to organize, mandating an eight-hour workday, or supporting an inflationary monetary policy because these measures, from the liberals' perspective, benefited some groups (laborers and debt-ridden farmers) at the expense of others (industry owners and creditors).⁷

Simplify the philosophy sufficiently, and turn from the economy as a whole back to the individual in Lincoln's address, and you end up in the company of Horatio Alger Jr. That Massachusetts-born writer charmed young readers with stories of Ragged Dick, the penniless shoeshine boy who struggles to make his way in New York City. After many colorful adventures, Dick transforms himself into Richard Hunter, Esquire, through a combination of honesty, thrift, self-denial, and the kindly attention of an older man who sees his promise. Alger had not originally intended his work to become an emblem of *laissez-faire* economics. He had exploited the rags-to-riches theme, in part, to lure readers to what might otherwise have been too grim a subject for juvenile fiction— orphaned boys living in the streets of the country's largest city. The stories might then, he wrote, "have the effect of enlisting the sympathies of his readers in behalf of the unfortunate children."⁸ As the myth that has grown around Alger's name shows, however, the effect was just the opposite. The ability of Dick and his fellow shoeshine boys to climb to bourgeois respectability suggested that while wide gulfs might seem to separate the street urchin from John Jacob Astor, upward mobility was always possible in America. In short, the system worked.

Ragged Dick found his literary and philosophical counterpart in Julian West, the hero of Edward Bellamy's 1888 novel *Looking Backward*. West is a wealthy, somewhat neurotic Boston bachelor transported over one hundred years into the future. Convinced that the poverty, economic inequality, and labor unrest of his day would haunt

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the country indefinitely, West is startled when he awakens in an industrial utopia overseen by an all-powerful but benevolent state.

The driving force behind his country's transformation, West discovered, is the same concentration of capital that had ignited and then sustained industrial growth during the nineteenth century. Small firms grew into larger ones, evolved into corporations, and then colluded with other corporations to form trusts, which then spread to other industries, and so forth. Eventually, a single national monopoly, the Great Trust, grew to encompass the whole economy and operate for the benefit of all citizens. There is no room for individual enterprise in this utopia, in the sense of investment outside the state, because the Trust operates with an economy of scale that shuts out any competitor. But, West learns from his guide in 2000, the spiraling consolidation of capital had already limited individual opportunity more than one hundred years before, especially for the working classes.

"Before this concentration began," says West's host, "the individual workman was relatively important and independent in his relations to his employer." With a new idea and a little money, a laborer could start a successful business, and thus there were no rigid barriers between social classes. "But when the era of small concerns with small capital was succeeded by that of great aggregations of capital, all this changed," he continues. "The individual laborer, who had been relatively important to the small employer, was reduced to insignificance and powerlessness over against the great corporation, while at the same time the way upward to the grade of employer was closed to him."⁹

The liberal hope of social mobility outlined by Lincoln and dramatized by Alger had become a tragic anachronism by the 1880s, according to Bellamy. The author of *Looking Backward* did not see smashing the monopolies as a solution. As the success of his utopia showed, they should be encouraged to grow until they evolved into instruments of a nationally planned economy. Unlike some of his Marxist contemporaries, Bellamy did not call for violent revolution—the utopia of the novel arose peacefully—or link the country's hopes for a better future with the worldwide movement of the working classes. Bellamy's ideas were socialist, but he expressed them in the familiar, soothing language of nationalism. His economy was national in scope, not global, and his citizens were intensely patriotic. Tormented by the social inequalities of his day, Bellamy wanted to harness the vast emotional and political power of nationalism and direct it to humanitarian ends. But his economic philosophy made his nationalism look much different than that advanced by the liberals: it was economically collectivist, not individu-

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alist, and it relied on state regulation and planning of industry, not laissez-faire.

Looking Backward became a wildly successful novel, surpassed in popularity at the turn of the century only by *Ben-Hur* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Devotees of the book and its classless society formed over 150 "Bellamy Clubs" across the country, started a magazine, and formed an important wing of the Populist Party. The book also inspired other utopian fiction, along with more practically oriented magazine articles that introduced middle-class readers to socialist-oriented nationalism.¹⁰

By the 1890s these competing strains of nationalist thought—liberal and humanitarian—provided a set of poles between which American politics would pivot for decades. Business leaders and social conservatives appealed to national loyalty when they opposed labor unions and welfare legislation as expressions of a divisive, class-based philosophy that threatened the economic liberty of capital. A Brooklyn minister, for instance, suggested in 1885 that the National Guard be put to patriotic use crushing strikes. Politicians heeded such calls. In 1892 federal troops stopped a walkout by silver miners in Idaho, and two years later President Grover Cleveland sent several thousand deputies to end a strike of Pullman railroad workers in Illinois. Cleveland championed a society held together, ironically, by its self-reliant and often atomistic nature. Despite his willingness to use federal power to resolve labor disputes, he claimed to be committed to limited government. He once rejected a call for federal aid to victims of a Texas drought because such help would weaken "the sturdiness of our national character" and discourage the private charity that "strengthens the bond of a common brotherhood."¹¹

To the left of liberals were Americans who argued that the rise of monopoly capitalism demanded more activist governments. According to these critics, if the state were given sufficient powers, it could protect farmers and workers from exploitation while safeguarding consumers from monopolists' high prices and frequently unsafe products. The Populists came closest to building a political platform around humanitarian nationalism, but the same ideas also influenced more moderate Progressives and inspired politicians like Woodrow Wilson. Nevertheless, liberal thinking tended to dominate federal policy until the start of the 1930s.

In the half-century before Rugg burst upon the publishing market, textbooks in American history also aligned firmly with the liberals. Back in the 1830s, Emma Willard had warned her young readers that the selfish pursuit of wealth would weaken the social bonds that made

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a republic possible. But as industrial growth seemed to confirm some of her fears, Willard's sense of foreboding slowly faded from later histories. Wary of entangling themselves in controversy, writers sketched a peaceful America in harmony with Horatio Alger, only without the vivid depictions of poverty that gave his books a slightly subversive edge. In one text, for instance, there is only a "supposed conflict between capital and labor."¹² Schoolbooks praised Cyrus McCormick, Andrew Carnegie, Thomas Edison, and other self-made entrepreneurs, holding them up as models for students. Rather than dwelling on economic inequities, they extolled the virtues of unrestrained industrial growth—marveling at inventions like the telephone and skyscraper, ticking off national progress through gains in the gross national product or miles of railroad track laid—in page after page of text and illustrations.

The 1897 edition of John Bach McMaster's *School History of the United States* epitomized the buoyant spirit of many texts. "Every class of society was benefited by these improvements," McMaster noted, "but no men more so than those who depended on their daily wages for their daily bread." The author even brought readers on an imaginary ride in a modern locomotive, a welcome change, he reminded his audience, from primitive means of travel early in the nineteenth century: "Now we step into a beautifully fitted car, heated by steam, lighted by electricity, richly carpeted, and provided with most comfortable seats and beds, and are whirled across the continent from Philadelphia to San Francisco in less time than it took Washington to go from New York to Boston." McMaster carefully avoided mentioning that large numbers of Americans could not have afforded such luxurious travel. He also failed to discuss the bitter and violent strike by Pullman workers who manufactured the kind of plush cars he discussed. Though McMaster and other text writers offered an aside or two on the plight of less fortunate Americans, real poverty rarely crept into their halcyon depictions of the country in their own day. All Americans were metaphorically and literally free to ride his train of progress.¹³

That tidy depiction of laissez-fair capitalism grew a bit tarnished in the first two decades of the twentieth century. David Muzzev was the most daring revisionist among textbook authors, but his *American History* was more nostalgic than radical. He saw both labor unions and great corporations, each products of the industrial revolution, as somehow inimical to national interests. Muzzev's philosophy often seemed Jeffersonian, full of longing for an individualist past of yeoman farmers and craftsmen who either worked alone or bargained as equals

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with their employers.¹⁴ He never fully wrestled with how industrial growth had fundamentally changed the country or explored alternatives to prevailing social and economic norms.

What changed the politics of both the nation at large and schoolbooks in particular was, of course, the Depression. The economic reversal that began in 1929 revived interest in Edward Bellamy and his ideas. When the historian Charles Beard and the educational philosopher John Dewey independently composed a list of the most influential works published since 1885, both put *Looking Backward* in second place, after Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*. After Franklin Roosevelt's election, newspapers began to draw parallels between *Looking Backward* and the new president's economic plans. A 1934 headline in the *Christian Science Monitor* proclaimed, "Bellamy Went to 2000 for New Deal, Part of Which Is Being Put into Use Today."¹⁵ Such stories tended to exaggerate the radicalism of the New Deal, but it was clear that FDR's brand of nationalism found a distant cousin in Bellamy's novel, a kinship perhaps unintentionally encouraged by the title of Roosevelt's 1933 book, *Looking Forward*.

Operating in an atmosphere of perpetual crisis during his first years in office, Roosevelt repeatedly invoked the sanctity of the nation to justify the expansion of federal control over the economy and the creation of a vast, overlapping network of short- and long-term social programs. He sometimes even capitalized the "N" in "nation" for printed copies of his speeches, including the one he delivered at his second inaugural. In that well-known speech, Roosevelt claimed he saw one-third of a nation ill housed, ill clad, and ill nourished. "It is not in despair that I paint you that picture," he told listeners:

I paint it for you in hope—because the Nation, seeing and understanding the injustice in it, proposes to paint it out. We are determined to make every American citizen the subject of his country's interest and concern. . . . The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much, it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.¹⁶

More than any president before him, Roosevelt acknowledged how capitalism generated systemic poverty. Through his New Deal programs, both those focused on simple recovery and those devoted to broader economic reform, he argued that minimal standards of living and true equality of opportunity could be assured only through a far

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more significant government role in the economy. Eager to present his ideas as both modern and rooted in traditional American ideas, Roosevelt and his associates appropriated the word "liberal" to describe them, thereby edging the word toward its modern social and political definition. In a confusing bit of semantic evolution, the old-style "liberals"—champions of free market and limited government—were now usually thought of as "conservatives."

Business leaders, alarmed by Roosevelt's embrace of some aspects of humanitarian nationalism in legislation such as the Social Security Act of 1935, led a backlash against the New Deal in the 1936 election. As Roosevelt's vision of a limited welfare state and partial retreat from laissez-faire capitalism gained coherence over the next two years, his opposition grew stronger. That bitter partisan debate set the stage for the attacks on Rugg's *Man and His Changing Society*, and they cannot be fully understood apart from it.

Roosevelt, the product of an elite New York family with a tradition of public service, was carefully groomed for the crucial role he would play in national politics. Rugg, in contrast, followed a less predictable path toward his own destiny as one of the great innovators in the social science curriculum. He was born in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, into a relatively prosperous working-class family descended from settlers who had arrived in America in the seventeenth century. He attended public schools that reflected what he later described as the narrow, nervous conformity of his hometown. Out of frustration, curiosity, and perhaps a bit of boredom, Rugg postponed college to take a job as a weaver in a textile mill. Firsthand experience taught him sympathy for industrial workers and skepticism about the virtues of unregulated capitalism. After his stint at the factory, Rugg attended Dartmouth College and earned a degree in civil engineering. He worked as a railroad surveyor and taught engineering for a few years but decided that precollegiate education was his calling. He finished his Ph.D. in 1915 and had something of an intellectual awakening as he devoured the works of contemporary social critics and intellectuals, including Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, James Harvey Robinson, and John Maynard Keynes, the economist whose work on fiscal policy would help to guide the New Deal. To Rugg they were "specialists on the frontier of thought," and he soon began to believe that the contemporary social issues and problems they explored could be introduced to students in the public schools, even at the elementary and junior high levels.¹⁷

Two historians in particular, Frederick Jackson Turner and Charles Beard, deeply influenced Rugg's understanding of America's past and

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present.¹⁸ From Turner, Rugg borrowed an emphasis on the West as a key determinant of the American character, which he saw as democratic, individualist, and self-reliant. Such sentiments had appeared in dozens of popular histories in the early twentieth century. But Rugg also wanted to explore the question left open at the end of Turner's 1893 essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." How would Americans safeguard their democratic values in an increasingly complex, interdependent, industrial society that no longer had an expanse of open land that continually renewed the American spirit?

While Turner provided Rugg with a reverence for the West, Beard offered a model of how class-based interests, and often class conflict, shaped historical change. That model, in turn, partly determined how Rugg answered Turner's question about how democracy would meet the challenge of the new era. When Rugg was finishing his doctoral work, Beard was already gaining fame, and in some circles infamy, for *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*. In it Beard claimed that the framers of the federal government represented the wealthy, property-holding citizens of the infant republic, not the masses of people who had supported and died for the Revolutionary cause. Predictably, he argued, statesmen like Alexander Hamilton and James Madison organized the new national government to protect their own interests and those of others in their social class. To critics of Beard, however, *Economic Interpretation* slandered the Founding Fathers and suggested they had snatched away an early chance for Americans to develop a true, popular democracy.

Accepting much of Beard's thesis, Rugg wanted to show young people how democracy had actually expanded on the foundation laid in 1787 and how it might continue to do so now that the United States had completed the transformation from an agrarian to an industrial economy. Rugg's approach to social studies was thus grounded in his belief in ongoing social change, and in the responsibility of schools to prepare children for it instead of forcing them to imbibe the sort of outdated knowledge and truisms he remembered from his own school days in Fitchburg.¹⁹

An experimental school at Columbia's Teachers College proved to be the ideal setting for Rugg to begin his work in curricular reform. Opened in September 1917, the Lincoln School was to be, according to a founding document, a "laboratory for the working out of an elementary and a secondary school curriculum, which shall eliminate obsolete material and endeavor to work up in usable form, materials adapted to

the needs of modern living." Rugg hoped to craft learning aids that would both build on knowledge Lincoln's students already possessed and have them "learn by doing." True to progressive principles, Rugg expected young people to debate ideas he adapted from "frontier thinkers," not memorize a textbook. With a touch of the arrogance that sometimes slipped into his work, he dismissed social science texts then on the market as "veritable encyclopedias." The claim had some justification. In 1920 schools were still using tomes like David Montgomery's *Leading Facts of American History*, whose title neatly captured its organizing principle. But many good narrative histories had already appeared, particularly for high school students. Rugg did not aspire just to write history, however, but to fuse history with civics, geography, and other disciplines to create a more complete picture of the origins of present-day society. More than any other single educator, he would end up creating the modern academic subject of "social studies."²⁰

Rugg began designing materials on mimeographed sheets. They quickly proved cumbersome, so he hit on the idea of printing a series of pamphlets. Using connections with colleagues and former students, he raised funds for the project from a network of schools across the country. They underwrote production costs and, in turn, received the pamphlets as soon as Lincoln's students did. By the summer of 1922 Rugg had four thousand orders from participating schools, and demand increased steadily as he revised existing pamphlets and created new ones. Over three hundred schools were using them by 1926, prompting several publishers to express interest in turning the pamphlets into books. Rugg chose to work with Ginn and Company, and in 1929 his first book's initial print run of twenty thousand copies sold out in four months.²¹ It was a harbinger of brisk sales that would continue even as the Depression squeezed school budgets.

Man and His Changing Society explored world history and culture, but Rugg devoted much of his energy to examining the United States, particularly in two volumes for junior high students: *America's March toward Democracy: A History of American Life, Political and Social* and *The Conquest of America: A History of American Civilization, Economic and Social*. As his subtitles suggest, Rugg reached well beyond narrow political history. But what really set his books apart from others on the market was their emphasis on conflict—between individuals, between governments and governed, and especially between social classes. Conflict gave these books for elementary and junior high students a clear narrative trajectory and made them far more compelling

and readable than nominally more "advanced" books for high school students.

Rugg's style was unmistakable almost from the first page. In the introduction to *America's March toward Democracy*, he asked readers to analyze the story of a fictional town called Franklin, where a governor calls out troops to "maintain order" during a labor strike. He then pointedly defined political history as the "continual struggle between groups of people, each of whom desired to control government." Disparities in wealth and income often propelled this struggle in his books, either implicitly or explicitly. The guided airplane tour that opened *The Conquest of America* began in the South, where readers flew "over poor hill farms where the farmers can hardly get a living." Further on they viewed a shantytown for textile workers, whose lot Rugg understood from personal experience: "Can people live in such houses? we ask. 'They can't afford anything better on eight or ten dollars a week,' our guide answers."²²

As readers continued, traveling backward from the 1930s to the late eighteenth century, they found a history that differed much from what their parents or older siblings had read in school. Borrowing from progressive historians like Carl Becker, Rugg asked students to think of the Revolution not merely as a contest between the British and Americans but as a struggle among social classes on both sides of the Atlantic. Acknowledging that social divisions were less rigid in America than in England or the rest of Europe, Rugg nevertheless stressed that the colonies were far from the unstratified society that most earlier writers had depicted. *Conquest* explained that "the division of America into classes was largely on the basis of money, possessions, and family position. The few members of the wealthy class insisted on their right to govern the more numerous 'lower' class." Later Rugg noted that "From the very first years in America the mass of people struggled against the control of the wealthy property owners." When the British imposed the Stamp Tax and other measures, it was the "laboring classes" who protested by boycotting goods, tarring and feathering tax collectors, and dumping tea into Boston Harbor.²³

In Rugg's books, the colonial elites were nearly as distressed by the patriot uprising as the British themselves:

But a movement had started which they [the wealthy] could not stop. The skilled workers and laborers of the cities, the frontiersman and the small farmers, and a few intelligent leaders were actively bringing about a revolution. They frequently forced hes-

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itating merchants to act. From that time on, the rebellion proceeded largely against the wishes of the upper classes. There was more and more opposition from many well-to-do people who sympathized with England.

Rugg did qualify such sweeping statements. For instance, he noted that some of the Tories came from the ranks of the "common people" and that some of the Revolution's most able leaders, including Jefferson and Washington, were wealthy landowners. On "the whole, however, the aristocrats were more anxious for peace with England than were the common people."²⁴

Like writers who had come under fire in the 1920s, Rugg reinterpreted the Revolution, the story of national creation, to support his own vision of the American community. Authors like David Muzzey and Willis Mason West had stressed the links between the two branches of the "English-speaking race" in Europe and North America.²⁵ For some writers, that stance reflected a desire for cultural rapprochement with Britain and suspicions that recent immigrants did not measure up to their Anglo-Saxon predecessors. Rugg was neither an Anglophile nor a nativist, however. He never equivocated on the question of whether the split with Britain was justified. What distinguished his account of the Revolution was a foregrounding of class issues in the colonies' dispute with the mother country and the claim that disparities in wealth had divided the nation from its beginning. For Rugg, the world of the 1770s was not *that* much different from the present, in which the families of textile workers huddled in shacks.

Rugg continued to use class as a historical lens when he turned to the years after the war. In other books, the story of the United States under the Articles of Confederation amounted to a brief lesson in the perils of political disorder: the love of liberty, which had defeated British tyranny, sowed economic and social chaos when it proceeded unchecked. Rugg complicated and enriched that story, delving into monetary policy in language an eighth-grader could understand. Debtors wanted the states to print more money so that they could more easily pay off loans, claimed Rugg, but the rich opposed currency inflation because they were not eager to be paid back in depreciated dollars. The impasse paralyzed the economy. The poor struggled to survive through the crisis, but what, he asked pointedly, "was the condition of the well-to-do? Some of the people seem to have been doing quite well. A Boston merchant speaks of the demand for such luxuries

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as French silks and cambrics. He says in one letter: 'I would observe that people dress as much and as extravagantly as ever.'"

The solution to the disorder, in all histories, including Rugg's, was a more powerful national government. But Rugg questioned whether the creation of this government represented only good sense and civic virtue. Again, he looked to social class, now drawing on Beard and his *Economic Interpretation*. While poor and middle-income Americans favored a stronger central state to create a national currency and stabilize commerce, Rugg argued, wealthy speculators in western lands had a more selfish reason for favoring the Constitution. When the newly invigorated federal government surveyed the land and established army posts, the value of the speculators' investments soared.

A group of even less reputable investors also proved eager to cash in on the new order, according to Rugg. In 1790 Treasury Secretary Hamilton drew up a plan to redeem old Continental bonds and paper money at full value. Patriotic citizens had originally purchased and used these notes during the war, but in the slump that followed they had been trading at a few cents on the dollar. "Congress had no sooner heard of Hamilton's plan than some of the members of the Senate and the House of Representatives and well-to-do friends who were in on the secret began their dishonest work," Rugg noted in a conspiratorial tone in *America's March toward Democracy*. The speculators hurried to backwoods communities and purchased the bills from unsuspecting farmers who still believed them to be nearly worthless. To dramatize the swindle, Rugg provided a half-page illustration of one such scene: A stylishly dressed man in a top hat sits outside a log cabin tallying up his purchase as a buckskin-clad settler looks on. The frontiersman's curious wife peeks out from an open doorway.

Rugg chastised such "clever people" who would manipulate politics for personal gain:

These two classes of speculators were gambling in public lands and public money. They added in no way to the country's wealth. They produced nothing from the earth, manufactured no new goods, suggested no new ideas to benefit the people. They were simply making money by gambling. But to make their speculations profitable a strong central government was necessary. It is easy to understand, therefore, that they would be among those who worked hardest to establish such a government.

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Readers went away from Rugg's books with the message that the Constitution and the political system it created were mixed triumphs. Most Americans enjoyed the advantages of greater political and military stability. But a wealthy minority benefited more than others. And that was precisely the aim of the "prosperous, intelligent, even brilliant Americans" who drafted the Constitution. That class of people advanced their own interests and provided checks and balances, such as the Electoral College, that partially insulated federal power from the direct will of the people. The "merchants, the landowners, the manufacturers, the shippers, and the bankers were given what they wanted," concluded Rugg. "They obtained a government which would keep money and trade in sound condition, preserve order within the country, and defend the nation against foreign enemies."²⁶

Like the drafting and adoption of the Constitution, the rise of industry provided Rugg an opportunity to weigh social gains against losses. The half-century from 1850 to 1900, the era of the country's great industrial expansion, "was indeed the most important single period in the raising of the common man's standard of life," Rugg wrote. His readers learned that Americans of their own time were "living far more comfortable lives than their forefathers of even two generations ago." Yet he clearly sympathized with the working classes, noting that a majority of nineteenth-century factory laborers were "condemned to a life of poverty and long hours of hard toil." Almost always, he asserted, "the wages of the worker were too small to meet the increasing costs of living. Almost always slight improvements were won only by fighting and suffering. Almost always the conditions of many workers remained bad, even though improvements were made." Rugg occasionally discussed economic exploitation as a moral and personal issue. At one point, for instance, he condemned some "miserly, wealthy landlords" who managed urban tenements. More often, however, Rugg suggested that the problems of poverty were systemic. Addressing the conflict between capital and labor, he characterized the "evils of the factory system" as unexpected and largely unavoidable by-products of a new economic system. Rugg also sometimes praised industrial pioneers for their temerity and genius. Railroad baron Cornelius Vanderbilt was not a villain, for instance, but a "far-seeing businessman."²⁷

The American histories in *Man and His Changing Society* were complex works that defied simple characterization, and a few carefully chosen quotations can distort them. Rugg did see America divided into four groups—farmers, often poor; the "great American middle class";

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of towns and cities; destitute tenement dwellers; and men and women of leisure. And by stressing how "utterly differently the four classes" lived, he raised questions about national unity and deliberately subverted myths about equality of opportunity. He asked readers of his books to let the problem of material inequality "be constantly" in their thoughts as they studied America's history and contemporary life.²⁸

While class conflict enlivened his narrative, it did not overwhelm it. Glancing quickly through the books, one might have seen little to distinguish them from others on the market. Rugg painted a romantic picture of the West; praised the melting pot; and showed delight in cataloging recent advances in transportation, communication, architecture, and other fields. He also strove for a sort of "balance" by examining controversial issues from multiple perspectives. But he did not struggle to avoid all appearance of bias. He was far more interested in engaging students, getting them to grapple with ideas, and sometimes leading them toward his own views, than in letting the facts of history somehow "speak for themselves." His politics and social philosophy deeply influenced his textbooks, a fact he never denied.

Rugg belonged to a school of left-leaning progressive educators called social reconstructionists who believed that *laissez-faire* economics had failed America and had to be abandoned. The problem for reconstructionists was not merely that mostly unregulated capitalism had led to huge gaps in wealth between the rich and poor. They argued that the materialist and individualist ethos that underlay the system had also poisoned political, cultural, and intellectual life in the United States. The reconstructionists hoped to reform that system and undo the damage, humanizing industrial civilization through some combination of central planning and government regulation of the economy. Further, they believed that progressive educators should employ schools to change popular attitudes and misconceptions that supported the status quo, thereby accelerating the expected economic and social transformation. Rugg, in particular, believed that American schools suffered from a "cultural lag." Remembering his childhood in Fitchburg, he concluded that most schools were conservative institutions where teachers trundled out a shopworn curriculum that did little to prepare students for a changing world. He wanted his textbooks to help close the gap between school and society.²⁹

In the hands of its more enthusiastic supporters, reconstructionism veered toward indoctrination. George Counts, whose research in the 1920s examined how schools perpetuated inequalities along class, race, and ethnic lines, took a fact-finding tour of the Soviet Union in 1927.

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He came back impressed. Counts did not endorse all of the Communist Party's goals, but he did admire how the party used the schools to achieve them. The subtlety of that distinction did not entirely allay anxieties of moderates in the movement, nor did Counts's provocatively titled 1933 manifesto, *Dare the Schools Build a New Social Order?* Particularly during the early 1930s, the more militant reconstructionists flirted with revolutionary rhetoric and displayed an often uncritical enthusiasm for Soviet models. Editors of the movement's semi-official journal, *Social Frontier*, also printed the work of genuine radicals, including Earl Browder, the general secretary of the Communist Party in the United States.³⁰

Reconstructionist ideas occasionally crept into Man and His Changing Society. Rugg praised the "wise educational philosophers" then reforming the country's schools, for instance, and showed a distinct fondness for the "scientific planning" of society and for the sophisticated people he thought could best undertake it. In one book, he introduced readers to five typical Americans: Mr. Very Poor Man, Mr. Average Worker, Mr. Average White Collar Man, Mr. Prosperous Business Man, and Mr. Cultured Man. Though his income was modest, Mr. Cultured Man was happy and content. He, his wife, and his children watched avant-garde films, visited art galleries, and read challenging literature (unlike the "standard" or middlebrow fare perused by Mr. Average White Collar Man). "How much courage could the people of America take if they could see this house and realize what could be done with education and careful thought?" concluded Rugg in a passage about Mr. Cultured Man, who seemed like a stand-in for the author himself.³¹

Did Rugg's books cross the line between merely discussing and openly promoting the sort of social reform needed for the "Great Society" he advocated in his professional writing? At times, yes. In his scholarly book *The Great Technology*, Rugg called for replacing what he saw as the pell-mell of laissez-faire economics with careful planning by the state. In the 1931 edition of the textbook *An Introduction to the Problems of American Culture*, in turn, Rugg informed students that after implementing programs for social security, unemployment relief, and other immediate needs, the United States should undertake "nation-wide plans for co-operative control" of transportation and communication and for the production of basic foodstuffs, clothing, and housing. Elsewhere in the text he speculated that if adequate strategies were implemented, poverty could be eliminated and all the "necessities and comforts" Americans needed could be produced in a

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twelve-hour workweek—a utopian scenario that owed much to Bellamy's *Looking Backward*.³²

In *The Conquest of America*, Rugg partially justified his high hopes for state planning by citing what he saw as the happy precedent of government control of prices and the takeover of some industries during World War I. While wartime economic policy merited only a sentence or two in most histories, Rugg called it, in bold print, a "Lesson in Co-operation and Government Regulation." Americans gained critical experience from the episode, according to the author: "First, they learned that in our kind of interdependent world the people have to cooperate with one another; second, they learned that the government may have to step in and take charge of our lives." It was, editorialized Rugg, "the greatest effort that the American people had ever made to do things together as a people."

Rugg also used this passage to hammer in another key theme from his professional work: that individual freedom in America would have to be balanced against the larger good of society, with the state as arbiter. Farmers, workers, and business corporations had all benefited from federal control, Rugg pointed out, but they had to give something up as well. They had to become "used to having the national government step in and tell them what to do. This was something new in America, for each man had always believed he could do largely as he pleased—as long as he obeyed the law." In Rugg's version of events, businessmen refused to accept the lesson, demanding a return to pre-war policies once the armistice had been signed. "Give back the railroads to their private owners," they said. "Let us run our affairs by ourselves. We don't need you," they cried.³³

This account had a distinctly tinny quality, at odds with the usually intelligent tone of the books. Rugg claimed that he tried to ensure that every "bit of history" he put into his texts had a "clearly established functional justification."³⁴ When he wanted to use history to demonstrate an argument, however, to make it "functional" in the crudest sense, he lapsed into melodrama. The rogues to boo here are business owners who "cry" for government to "take its hands off their operations" in the 1920s, thereby setting the stage for the crash of 1929. If this was not indoctrination, it came perilously close.

As the excerpt on government planning suggests, Rugg departed from previous textbook writers in another way. He explained recent events in a bold, direct manner. The general rule of writing history for the schools had been that the closer authors came to the present, the less freedom they could exercise in interpreting events or even men-

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tioning potentially divisive issues. History in the living memory of teachers and textbook boards simply aroused too many passions.³⁵ That practical sales strategy, however, directly contradicted the philosophy of progressive educators in the emerging field of social studies. Eager to make schooling relevant to students' lives, they wanted the curriculum to focus on current social problems. With that strategy guiding his work, Rugg could hardly ignore the Depression, clearly the biggest "social problem" of the 1930s.

Building on his books' emphasis on social class, he explained that the primary cause of the economic collapse was unequal distribution of income. Had America really been prosperous during the 1920s? "Those who thought about the 60,000,000 to 70,000,000 poorer people said: No!" There was, he wrote, a "tremendous difference in the income of the 'rich' and 'poor,'" and with such inequity, "it is clear that many of our people could not buy the fine things which were available." He then presented a daunting array of statistics to prove his point. But poverty was not simply bad for the poor; by leading to underconsumption, Rugg explained, it endangered the economy as a whole. When workers and farmers could not purchase the growing numbers of shoes, cars, toasters, and washing machines, unsold items piled up on showroom floors and factory shelves. But many Americans "closed their eyes" to these facts. "In the summer of 1929," Rugg concluded ominously, "it seemed that they were really living 'in the best of all possible worlds.'" Teachers and students who knew from personal experience what happened next must have appreciated the ironic suspense, even if they missed the reference to Voltaire's *Candide*.

Rugg simplified the economics of the crash a bit, as he had to for his young audience, but the underconsumption argument was fundamentally sound. However, Rugg was not satisfied merely with overturning the myth of the prosperous 1920s. He went on to paint President Herbert Hoover as a callous leader keen on denying responsibility for the economic downturn and keeping the burden for relief squarely at the state and local levels. And then Rugg sided unabashedly with the current chief executive and his New Deal:

We see then that the Roosevelt Administration decided that the relief of the American people from distress is a national problem, not merely one for state, local, or private charity. It said that in times of distress the Federal government should step in and, if need be, give billions of dollars for relief! Relief for the unemployed, relief for distressed homeowners, relief for

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stranded youths, relief for impoverished farmers, relief for ailing businesses. In short, it must give relief to every needy group within the nation.³⁶

In its departure from the rule about approaching recent history in a blandly neutral way, Rugg's discussion of the Depression was little short of incredible. He vilified a living ex-president only five years out of office. He endorsed a partisan economic policy still working its way through Congress. He championed a president loathed by critics on the right. Condemning the laissez-faire philosophy of the Republicans, he embraced humanitarian nationalism, which was anchored by the conviction that the people, acting through government, were responsible for the welfare of all citizens. Most daringly, Rugg returned again to the issue of class, tying previous struggles for economic and social justice to the unresolved political questions of the 1930s.

How did Rugg get away with it? Why did his publisher not demand a "balanced" textbook, particularly after weathering the textbook wars of the 1920s?

Two factors unique to the 1930s, and one unique to Rugg, explain this apparent mystery. First, there was the wrenching experience of the Depression itself. With almost a quarter of workers unemployed and most of the rest living on reduced incomes, the political and cultural consensus that textbooks usually reflect had collapsed. At a time when a financially unbalanced plan to "Share the Wealth" propelled Huey Long onto the national stage, and Father Charles Coughlin enraptured radio listeners with increasingly anti-Semitic explanations for the country's troubles, Rugg's version of American history looked comparatively tame, even if it was directed at impressionable young people.

Second, a scandal had recently erupted when several American corporations were found trying to manipulate textbook content. During the 1920s many states and cities were considering increased regulation or direct control of their gas, electric, railway, and other utilities. To forestall such plans, an industry coalition led a national propaganda effort around the "public utility question." Corporations waged most of their campaign in the open, but when journalists found that they were also quietly pressuring publishers to revise schoolbooks to ensure positive treatment of private utilities, charges of censorship began to fly. The Federal Trade Commission began hearings on the issue in 1928. Understandably, corporations became skittish about any further involvement with schools or their curricula. With business leaders effectively recusing themselves, educators had what an observer at the

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time termed a greater "disposition to be experimental" in the teaching of "social-economic relations."³⁷ Rugg was not the only progressive educator to benefit from the changed mood. *The Building of Our Nation*, a history by Eugene C. Barker, Henry Steele Commager, and Walter P. Webb, endorsed a limited welfare state. The authors of another popular text, *The United States in the Making*, cited Charles Beard's work in their discussion of the Constitution. Even Beard himself sold a considerable number of the texts he coauthored with his wife, Mary. Still, why did no writer dare to go as far to the left as Rugg?

The explanation was fairly simple. Ginn and Company gave their author extra leeway because he had effectively test-marketed much of the books' content when he first released the pamphlets they were based on back in the 1920s. Rugg was also a flexible author, willing to revise as events warranted. When the horrors of collectivization under Josef Stalin became more widely known as the 1930s progressed, for instance, Rugg's books grew more critical of the Soviet Union. Man and His Changing Society also became more popular with each passing year, apparently validating Rugg's ideas and his approach to teaching. According to one Ginn editor, nobody at the firm predicted any especially bitter attacks would begin in 1939, after the series had already been in schools for a decade.³⁸

Yet there had been a few signs of trouble. As far back as 1927 a corporation had objected to schools in one Appalachian city employing Rugg's pamphlets. The company backed down, but teachers were thereafter reluctant to use the materials. The mid-1930s also witnessed little-publicized complaints about his books in Montana, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, and Iowa. Perhaps the greatest portent of conflict had nothing to do with his books at all. In 1933 Rugg spoke at a conference on "Youth and the World" sponsored by the *New York Herald Tribune*. He said nothing of political importance, but the *Daily Worker*, the official newspaper of the American Communist Party, covered the event and mentioned him in passing. A prominent anti-communist named Elizabeth Dilling spotted the story and added Rugg to *Red Network*, a field guide to alleged subversives much perused by red-baiting groups in the 1930s and 1940s.³⁹

Rumbles of thunder finally gave way to rain in Englewood, New Jersey, in the spring of 1939. Bertie Forbes, publisher of *Forbes* magazine and a columnist for *William Randolph Hearst's* newspapers, took a seat on Englewood's Board of education. This mostly affluent bedroom community across the Hudson River from Manhattan had

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already witnessed a quiet, behind-the-scenes effort to pressure teachers to drop Rugg's books.⁴⁰ Forbes now brought the campaign into the open, using his position on the board and access to the press to wage an unrelenting assault on Rugg that deeply divided the city.

Attacks intensified as spring turned to summer. Inspired by Forbes, the New York-based Advertising Federation of America began criticizing Rugg's books for their claims that advertising raised costs and sometimes misrepresented goods. Sounding almost personally wounded, the organization's research director, Alfred Falk, said Rugg's *Introduction to Problems of American Culture* "built up" a picture of advertising "as a pretty rotten sort of institution." Ironically, Rugg had actually credited the federation for its work in eliminating unfair practices in the industry. Nonetheless, the federation sent a letter to members claiming that Rugg had given a black eye to their trade and capitalism in general. "Attacking business from every angle," it read, "Rugg sneers at the ideas and traditions of American democracy, making a subtle plea for abolition of our free enterprise system and the introduction of a new social order based on the principles of collectivism." The federation urged its sixty affiliated groups to wage local campaigns against Rugg.⁴¹

The advertisers' crusade was soon dwarfed by the efforts of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM). Citing a "widespread and increasing" fear that un-American ideas had been creeping into schools in recent years, NAM funded a survey of six hundred textbooks in the social sciences, including history, economics, sociology, civics, and geography. That venture struck close to home for Rugg, for it was led by a colleague at Columbia, an economics professor named Ralph Robey. Released in January 1941, the report targeted Rugg more than any other writer for giving students a biased view of America's economic and political systems. NAM forwarded the twelve-hundred-page, single-spaced document to state boards of education, libraries at teachers colleges, and teachers' organizations. It also encouraged manufacturers to visit local schools to obtain lists of textbooks in use. Leaders disavowed charges of censorship. "It would be a grave mistake for any person," read an official statement, "whether a manufacturer or of any other calling, to seek to have the schools discontinue the explanation of any subject or any philosophy simply because it is inconsistent with a philosophy traditionally accepted in this country." Faced with criticism in the press, NAM then sent letters clarifying its policy to thirty-eight thousand teachers and ten thousand

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school administrators, an outwardly reassuring gesture that actually underscored how much money and time the organization was willing to expend in the cause.⁴²

Several other conservative or right-wing organizations and individuals hopped on the anti-Rugg bandwagon. George Sokolsky, a publicist for NAM, wrote a series of articles on the subject for *Liberty* magazine and *Nation's Business*. An American Legion officer named A. G. Rudd teamed up with Alfred Falk from the Advertising Federation to form the Guardians of American Education. That group tried to ban Rugg's books from New York schools. The Guardians also published what was, relative to more hostile assessments of Rugg's work, a well-researched, forty-three-page critique called *Undermining Our Republic: Facts about Anti-American Schoolbooks and the Nationwide Scheme of Radical Educators*. Other Legionnaires also became interested in Rugg's case after a national committee in the organization declared that his books opposed the "American tradition" and were "not suitable" for schools. An influential article by O. K. Armstrong entitled "Treason in the Textbooks" appeared in the Legion's monthly magazine. A business executive with close ties to the organization also tried to get Rugg investigated by the Dies Committee, forerunner to the infamous House Committee on Un-American Activities (HCUA).⁴³

Others played key roles in this loose coalition against the progressive educator. Mervyn K. Hart, head of the self-styled New York Economic Council, wrote letters and pamphlets denouncing Rugg and was instrumental in getting the books removed from schools in Binghamton, New York. The Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Daughters of Colonial Wars soon entered the fray as well. Rugg also believed that publishing rivals of Ginn and Company stoked the controversy surrounding Man and His Changing Society. The claim may not have been far-fetched. The Advertising Federation of America, one of his fiercest opponents, was chaired by Mason Britton. Britton also happened to be vice chairman of the board at the McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, and that firm published a two-volume history called *Our American Heritage* that competed directly with books by Rugg.

Looming above all the critics was Hearst. Though rarely seen, Hearst was an unavoidable presence in the controversy, as he had been in the textbook battles of the 1920s, when his publications led the charge against pro-Britishism in the schools. The publishing magnate, who by the mid-1930s controlled twenty-nine newspapers in eighteen cities, took a considerable interest in protecting schools from what he thought of as subversive ideas.⁴⁴

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The nature of complaints against Rugg varied somewhat among critics. Many thought he was simply too forthcoming with unflattering truths about the nation's past. A corresponding secretary for the Daughters of Colonial Wars claimed that Rugg tried "to give the child an unbiased viewpoint instead of teaching him real Americanism. All the old histories taught my country right or wrong. That's the point of view we want our children to adopt. We can't afford to teach them to be unbiased and let them make up their own minds."⁴⁵ Others shared that conviction but chose not to express their hostility to critical thinking in the schools quite so baldly. A few of Rugg's antagonists believed he was a genuine radical, a Soviet agent committed to the violent overthrow of the U.S. government. Whatever individual axes they had to grind, the critics shared several misgivings about the author and his book series. Rugg, they said, unduly emphasized class fissures in America's past and dwelled too extensively on poverty. He suggested that unsavory financial motives guided the country's revered statesmen, business leaders, and corporations. He tried to undermine faith in free enterprise and individual initiative, thereby subverting patriotism and making children more susceptible to the lures of "collectivism." Finally, critics linked Rugg and progressive educators led by John Dewey with what they perceived as a dangerous leftward trend in American politics since the election of 1932.

The authors of the conservative pamphlet *Undermining Our Republic* argued that Rugg made American history "a drab story of selfishness, greed, imperialist expansion, exploitation, and class antagonisms." Armstrong agreed with that assessment in his essay in *American Legion Magazine* and suggested that teachers all too willingly parroted the themes in Rugg's books. He opened "Treason in the Textbooks" with an anecdote about his fourteen-year-old son returning from school curious to know whether George Washington had been a "big business man." Queried about what he meant by the question, the teenager said he had been learning such things from his teacher. Armstrong took quick action:

I went straight to the instructor. She told me, with evident consternation, that old methods of teaching were being supplanted by a more "realistic" approach to problems. It's all part of "progressive" education. For instance, the men who framed the Constitution were the "upper class," she insisted; they were the owners of land, shippers and moneyed men generally. They were particular to safeguard the capitalistic system, and school chil-

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dren should be taught that fact "as an intelligent approach to present-day problems."⁴⁶

The claim that textbooks slandered heroes was old, a relic of the 1920s and earlier decades. But the connections between the historical revisionism begun by Charles Beard and the "present-day problems" at the end of the 1930s, when the United States struggled to shake off a decade-long Depression and gird itself for a possible war, gave the timeworn charge new relevance. Criticisms of America's free-enterprise system, warned Columbia's Ralph Robey, would tend to create discontent and unrest. Man and His Changing Society "planted the seed" of class hatred, according to Falk, Rudd, and their *Undermining Our Republic* coauthor Hamilton Hicks. The series was "clearly calculated" to "cause pupils to rebel against all authority," added Forbes. "The Rugg books tend to destroy unity and to cause distrust of the founding fathers of our country," declared an American Legion official in Port Chester, New York, soon after the Germans overran France. "At a time like this we need full national unity."⁴⁷

Few Americans doubted the need for solidarity, least of all Rugg, whose appraisals of the world situation had grown increasingly somber by the start of the 1940s. The crux of the debate over his books was never about unity per se, however, but about how young Americans should conceive of that unity. Rugg's detractors argued that world crisis demonstrated the need for a return to economic and educational values that they believed had once bound Americans together, among them individualism, free enterprise, limited government, and an embrace of tradition for its own sake. Rugg argued, and arranged his history and civics texts to demonstrate, that America's political and economic ideology had to continue evolving to meet crises at home and the challenge of communism and fascism abroad. The welfare state would have to expand, claimed Rugg, and the government would have to take more direct control of economic development.

If the controversy over Rugg often sounded like a proxy war over the New Deal, that's because it was, at least in part. Accusations that sinister, foreign ideas lurked behind his books, the reconstructionists, and progressive education in general certainly raised eyebrows, but they made far less sense in 1940 than they might have in 1933. Even firebrand George Counts had grown disenchanted with Stalin, and he was elected president of the American Federation of Teachers after promising to end communist influence in the union.⁴⁸ The homegrown

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economic reform of the New Deal was not dead, however, and it continued to bedevil conservatives.

The authors of *Undermining Our Republic*, for instance, claimed Rugg's texts unduly emphasized poverty in Appalachia, thereby making the Tennessee Valley Authority look like a godsend to the region's inhabitants. They also complained that Rugg told students that the Supreme Court favored the wealthy, pointing to questions in the workbook for *America's March toward Democracy*: "From which economic class did the members [of the court] come? To what extent did they interpret the laws in the interest of all the people? In the interest of the well-to-do classes?"⁴⁹ Here, it was hard to miss a wry commentary on Roosevelt's ill-fated court-packing scheme. Beginning in 1935 the Supreme Court had begun declaring New Deal programs unconstitutional. Full of economic conservatives appointed by previous administrations, the court of the mid-1930s did embody the narrow class interests Rugg alluded to in *America's March*. Hoping to salvage his programs, the president tried to bypass the justices. He announced plans to appoint up to six new members to the court, ostensibly to improve efficiency, but in fact to dilute the power of the conservatives. The plan backfired, disappointing Roosevelt's allies and handing his enemies evidence for their oft-repeated charge that he harbored a dictatorial streak. But as war approached, direct attacks on administration policies began to look unpatriotic, and so Rugg became a useful substitute target for the Wizard of Hyde Park.

The growth of organized labor in the 1930s, and the New Deal's official encouragement of it, also colored critiques of Rugg's work. In December 1936, General Motors workers in Flint, Michigan, took over their plant, refusing to leave until the company recognized their union. When local police tried to force them to vacate the premises, workers pelted them with nuts, bolts, coffee mugs, and bottles. Bucking the traditional pattern set by their predecessors, neither Michigan's governor nor the president intervened on GM's behalf, and the strikers won. Law-and-order conservatives were furious. As the uproar over Rugg began, Rudd, Falk, and Hicks blamed school propaganda for what seemed to them an inexplicable public sympathy for the autoworkers. "When immature minds are constantly deluged with attacks on our economic system, the 'aristocrat owners,' and private property, and with similar appeals to class hatred," they asked rhetorically, "is it surprising that in later years they see nothing wrong with the sit-down strike?"⁵⁰

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The aversion to Rugg reached beyond contemporary politics, however. Advocates of a government hands-off policy for the economy argued that *laissez-faire* was just to all citizens, so what troubled them most about Rugg was his tendency to demystify individual economic opportunity. If a reader did not believe in the ubiquity of opportunity, they realized, then poverty looked like a problem built into the American system and not the result of personal failures. They understood that discussion of material inequality without the corresponding affirmation of social mobility made America look like those old, class-bound societies of Europe. For conservatives of the 1930s and 1940s (heirs to nineteenth-century liberalism), faith in opportunity cemented the national union; without it, the specter of division, chaos, or collectivism loomed. Thus Rugg's skepticism on the issue topped their indictment against his books. They returned to the question of opportunity repeatedly in their attacks, often distorting Rugg's positions in the process.

Armstrong's article in the Legion's magazine included an illustration of a nearly demonic-looking teacher, presumably Rugg, in a rumpled jacket and tie (see fig. on pgs. 248–49). As his hands drip muck on books labeled "U.S. History," "U.S. Heroes," "Constitution," and "Religion," he gestures to a chalkboard where he has written, "AMERICA IS NOT A LAND OF OPPORTUNITY." Students look on in reverential confusion, one scratching his head, another clapping his hands together as if in prayer. Like other critics who attacked Rugg for his treatment of this topic, Armstrong cited a passage from a student workbook that asked if America provided opportunity for all its people. Rugg's suggested answer appeared in the teachers' guide: "The United States is not a land of opportunity for all our people; for one fifth of the people do not earn any money at all. There are great differences in the standards of living of the different classes of people." Here was a concrete example of what Armstrong referred to elsewhere in his article as a doctrine "so subversive as to undermine [students'] faith in the American way of life." Rugg and his allies were "intent upon breaking down respect for individual effort and initiative."⁵¹

Other critics drove home that point. In an essay fittingly entitled "Is Your Child Being Taught to Loaf?" George Sokolsky argued that it was not just Man and His Changing Society that was sapping the work ethic. The whole philosophy of progressive education was to blame. Homework had recently been decreased, he warned; once-rigorous books had been dumbed down. Less capable students were being advanced to the next grade. Sokolsky explained why:

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A new theory is motivating promotions. It is the theory that it is *socially* evil to leave a child behind; that it is *socially* sound to promote a child whether the child is bright or dumb, hard-working or lazy, honest or sneaky. In a word, it is a doctrine of sacrificing the competent, efficient, and hard-working child in the interests of the incompetent and lazy child. But is it really in the lazy child's interest? Is he not being kidded into believing that life is just a bowl of cherries—and that all he has to do is slide along? Would you want your child to gain that conception of life?

It was not difficult to make the jump from the classroom to the nation at large, from the frustrated or lazy child to the slow or disgruntled laborer on the assembly line. Sokolsky helped readers make that connection. Children, he wrote, had to be "trained to believe" in a competitive world where "men and women must work hard to get on," presumably without sit-down strikes or the aid of a "collectivist" state.⁵²

Rugg and other progressives had never meant to discredit the idea of opportunity in America, at least not to the extent Sokolsky imagined. John Dewey, like the conservatives, linked opportunity closely with America's national identity. But when he talked about "nationalizing education," Dewey argued that schools had to place a real chance for success in the hands of all students, not blithely claim that it was already there. For his part, Rugg celebrated opportunity where he found it in America's past. In *The Conquest of America*, he wrote that to immigrants the United States was a "land of promise." Although their lives might have been "hard and disagreeable at first, they were usually glad that they came."⁵³ Elsewhere, he recounted the success stories of entrepreneurs. However, Rugg did question whether Americans at the bottom and top of the social scale truly had equal prospects for success. That sentiment lay behind the oft-quoted passage from the teachers' guide that suggested America did not provide opportunity "for all our people." Rugg's books argued that the comforting moral of Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick*—that even a motherless shoeshine boy had a shot at the American dream—was deceptively simplistic. More than the debunking of heroes, the critique of the Constitution, or the attribution of base motives to advertisers, this was the kind of claim that made Man and His Changing Society so dangerous.

And interesting. Unlike many educational writers, Rugg had genuine ideas and the courage to express them. He openly bragged that "among the schoolbook authors of America" he alone "refused to

The "Frontier Thinkers" are trying to sell our youth the idea that the American way of life has failed.



Treason

most of us. Our children average from four to fifteen years. The older groups are in junior and senior high school. It's true we learned that our children are being taught, in the name of civics, social science and history, the same old, stale, conservative as our parents were. It's still a little vague about it, but give him three years more, and he'll be convinced that our "capitalistic system" is the fault of selfish fellows like Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson who wanted to save their property; that the poor man wasn't given proper consideration, that in Russia the youth are engaged in creating a beautiful, new democratic order, that modern business is for the benefit of the profit-makers, that advertising is an economic waste, that morality is a relative value, and that family life will soon be radically changed by state control.

All out of textbooks and courses adopted by public high schools in the good old U. S. A.—by state and local school authorities that likely do not know they have been taken for a ride by the most insidious attack of un-Americanism yet perpetrated by the Dixie Communists on the American Activities.

It's a case for the Dixie Communists on the American Activities. And with the vigorous cooperation of The American Legion the Dixie Communists have arranged to have their own textbooks in our schools. But it's more than that. It's even for the personal attack on our institutions.

"Each ten years?" That's the motto of the radical and communitarian textbook writers who all too evidently have been in control of the field. You expect college and graduate students to delve into controversial social and political theories. But it's

By O. K. ARMSTRONG



THE AMERICAN LEGION MAGAZINE

An illustrator for the *The American Legion Magazine* depicts a progressive educator, likely meant to be Harold Rugg, corrupting America's youth. Illustrations and text reprinted with permission of *The American Legion Magazine*, September 1940.

in the TEXTBOOKS

the junior and senior high school years that provide the lasting impressions. Teach a boy or girl of twelve to sixteen that George Washington might have been a land-grabber, James Madison a slanty trader, the Constitution a protector of the economic royalist, and modern business an oppressor of the poor man, and the idea sticks.

It's time to cite chapter and verse. Obviously, long and detailed quotations are impossible in a brief article.

The best we can do is to select a few samples, list the textbooks now under scrutiny by the Legion's Americanism Commission and urge parents to proceed with their own investigations of textbooks and reference material used in their own schools.

By far the most profane of the social science schoolbook writers is Professor Harold O. Rugg of Teachers College, Columbia University, New York City. In 1933 Professor Rugg produced a book called *Great Technology*. The whole underlying thesis of this book is that our American way of life is a failure and must be replaced by a new order based upon some type of state socialism.

"Our task is nothing short of questioning a whole philosophy of living—the philosophy of capitalism and laissez-faire," says Prof. Rugg. He declares explicitly in this book that the public schools must be utilized to "change the climate of opinion" so that traditional American ideas and motivations will be abandoned.

His considerable vigor has set himself to this task, and he has won the approval of teachers and wild wilds in high schools all over America. Some dozen other authors have succeeded in having textbooks, similar in content and purpose to the Rugg course, adopted by state education boards.

Together these courses form a complete pattern of propaganda for a change in our political, economic and social order. The trick has been to consolidate what used to be separate studies of history, geography, civics and social science, all in one course and call it "Democratic Living" or something similar. The

See list of "Frontier Thinking" schoolbooks on page 71

westward movement of our pioneers, for example, can then be used to teach the geography of the country, the history of the times, the social problems encountered, and with whatever "integrated" the textbook plus the instructor might care to give them.

Major Augustin G. Rindt, a Legionnaire parent of Garden City, New York, whose courtesy was aroused—as was mine—by questions asked him by his children, made a study of all the textbooks used in his home town schools. His report of this study, now in the hands of the Americanism Commission, is a tribute to one man's determination to get to the bottom of subversive activities in the schools. In his report on the Rugg textbooks we find:

"In *People's Work Book* the question is asked: 'Is the United States a land of opportunity for all our people? Why?' This is the answer the child should give, according to (Continued on page 71)

dodge the question of public and private ownership." He wanted a debate on social and economic problems, and it surely gratified him to see critics of his textbooks, eager to gain ammunition against him, forced to slog through and to dissect his more "serious" works like *The Great Technology*. Most of Rugg's supporters, however, did not want to engage in that kind of debate, probably because they feared it would play to conservatives' efforts to brand him an ideologue out to corrupt young people. Like backers of historians in the textbook war of the 1920s, they preferred to cast the debate as one of fidelity to the historical record (Rugg) versus censorship (his opponents). A statement from a committee of supporters in Philadelphia epitomized this deliberate, reasoned, and altogether boring strategy: "Our examination of the Rugg books has not discovered any statements which taken with the complete context can be regarded as subversive of American ideals and principles. We have not found any statements which criticize our government, its policies, or our distinguished representatives, which are not truthful statements of facts."⁵⁴

Extremist tactics employed by a few of Rugg's opponents aided this effort to portray the educator as a beleaguered, misunderstood author of schoolbooks. Residents of Bradner, Ohio, for instance, made headlines when they tossed his texts into a school furnace.⁵⁵

Early in 1942 Rugg found another ally in the American Committee for Democracy and Intellectual Freedom, an organization founded in 1939 by some of the country's leading scholars. The group, whose executive committee included the atomic physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer, had already run afoul of conservatives for its critique of the communist-hunting Dies Committee. Now several of its members published an extensive review of Rugg's textbooks intended to rebut the NAM abstracts compiled by Columbia's Ralph Robey. The authors trotted out the usual shibboleths about accuracy and objectivity, but Robert S. Lynd, already famous for his sociological study *Middletown* (which Rugg had cited in his texts) offered a bit of a dissent. At the start of his review of *Changing Government and Changing Cultures*, Lynd declared that he was not an entirely impartial reviewer because he believed "in democracy" and "the broadening social control over property." If that constituted bias, then, yes, Rugg was biased too, Lynd implied. Every book, "if it is not to be an intellectual shambles, orients itself to certain selected problems and relevant events in the universe of experience with which it deals; and if one dislikes the problems and feels they should not be discussed in schools, one can accuse an author of bias because he writes about them."⁵⁶

Lynd admitted the obvious. The real conflict did not revolve around the truth of Rugg and the propaganda of business executives and the American Legion, or vice versa. That kind of paradigm had long since grown stale in debates over teaching history. Rugg had a distinct social and political philosophy, including a critique of untethered capitalism and a vision of how a more powerful state could promote national welfare and provide greater opportunity for all citizens. Those views structured but did not completely dominate his books. Rugg's opponents, by singling out and condemning certain text passages, articulated an opposing ideology. Academic freedom and censorship were still central to the uproar over *Man and His Changing Society*; after all, zealots were burning his books. But the more interesting clash was between conservative and humanitarian understandings of American nationalism—each no less impartial than the other—and how they would be embodied in the social studies curriculum. In that contest, participants knew, the sort of textbooks published in the ensuing years would serve as the yardstick of victory.

Neither side won. Rugg had the good fortune to attract numerous supporters, including the National Education Association, the American Civil Liberties Union, the *New Republic*, many newspapers, and countless professors, teachers, superintendents, clergy, and parents. Together, they won several battles. Bertie Forbes's crusade to drive Rugg's books out of Englewood failed. After earning the ire of many of the town's residents, particularly after shifting his attacks from Rugg to teachers, Forbes lost his seat on the board of education. Other towns and cities appeared to be following Englewood's lead. In the spring of 1941, the journal *School and Society* reported that the storm over Rugg had begun to subside, a sentiment echoed in *Publishers' Weekly*. Representatives of Ginn and Company told *Time* magazine that since the assault on their author had begun, they had actually been receiving larger orders for his books.

Officials at Ginn must have known they were whistling in the dark, however. Controversy sells trade books, but it dooms textbooks by making them politically costly to use. Some teachers and administrators backed Rugg even to the point of losing their jobs, earning his gratitude in his account of the affair, a book with the somewhat pedantic title *That Men May Understand*.⁵⁷ But many other educators did not. When a fervent corps of local business leaders or Legionnaires called for the ouster of Rugg's texts, they quietly acquiesced instead of mounting a protracted defense. More and more districts, from Los

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Angeles to suburban New York, quietly retired the series. If sales of books in the Man and His Changing Society series are considered in isolation, Rugg clearly lost this contest.

It would be a mistake to assume that public pressure alone accounted for the disappearance of the books. Forbes recognized another reason in his 1941 essay "Does This Smell of Sovietism?" The texts were "written a decade ago," he argued, and "misrepresent, in my judgment, the economic conditions now existing in America."⁵⁸ Forbes was right. Rugg produced most of his books in the depths of the Depression, but at the start of the 1940s his critiques of income disparities and laissez-faire capitalism had grown less relevant. By that time the federal government had established oversight or control over significant parts of the economy while also setting up a limited welfare state. The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) monitored Wall Street, while the Federal Depositors Insurance Corporation (FDIC) stabilized banking. Price supports and crop controls managed farm production. The Wagner Act guaranteed workers the right to organize, and the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) set a minimum wage and maximum hours for the workweek. In addition to old-age pensions, the Social Security Act granted aid to families with dependent children (now usually called "welfare"), payments to the disabled, and unemployment insurance. The world of 1929 was gone. The New Deal fell considerably short of the socialist utopia imagined by Edward Bellamy, or even the planned economy of Rugg's *Great Technology*, but it had moved the country to the left. And what the New Deal failed to achieve—an end to the Depression and the rebirth of economic opportunity for millions of unemployed Americans—government spending for World War II did.

In *America's March toward Democracy*, Rugg devoted three pages to an earnest discussion of socialism, giving roughly equal space to arguments for and against it. "There is one conclusion we can agree on, however," he intoned. "*The questions raised by the socialists and their opponents are of the greatest importance.*" By 1947 that observation seemed prophetic when applied to foreign policy, as the United States and the Soviet Union began waging the Cold War, but it looked almost quaint relative to domestic affairs. The earlier sense of crisis had passed, and the nation seemed to have found the magic formula for averting future downturns—an economy combining the tonic of free enterprise, increased regulation, and the kind of massive state spending advocated by the British economist John Maynard Keynes (one of Rugg's "frontier thinkers"). The creator of Man and His Changing

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Society even found kind words to say about this new mixed economy, likely because he saw it lending credence to his ideas.⁵⁹

Now that the polarizing turmoil of the 1930s was over, America as a whole sought a new political center. So did the writers of U.S. history for schools. They tried to balance the views of Rugg and his opponents to create a newly harmonious, unified picture of the nation. For just over fifteen years, the effort mostly succeeded.

Into the 1950s

Authors of postwar schoolbooks took some of their cues from professional historiography, which came to be dominated by the "consensus school." Left-leaning historians like Charles Beard and Carl Becker, who had analyzed social class and organized their work around clashes between the haves and the have-nots, or the "people" and the special interests, increasingly fell from favor. Chastened by fratricidal war and genocide in Europe, and disillusioned with radical politics after learning the extent of Stalin's atrocities in the Soviet Union, a new generation of historians eschewed conflict in their work. Instead, they sought to understand the common values and ideals that they believed had united Americans throughout their history. Perry Miller, best known for his books on New England's Puritans, assailed Beard for what he thought was an overly simplified economic determinism in the elder scholar's work on the Constitution. After taking a beating in the 1930s, the stock of nineteenth-century captains of industry went up; that of populists and other past critics of the status quo went down.

Extremism of any sort became suspect. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., whose father had defended his peers in the textbook battles of the 1920s, championed the "vital center" in American politics. The socialist Daniel Bell wrote about the "end of ideology." In the same vein, Daniel J. Boorstin, a university-trained historian who amassed a wide readership among the general public, argued that America's governing ideology was a *rejection* of the kind of political passion that had plunged Europe into terror. Other leading scholars expressed similar convictions. Studies in U.S. history with the sort of socially critical tone pioneered by Beard, who died in 1948, became far less common. While the transformation can easily be exaggerated—some labor historians, for instance, refused to join the general march toward the center—the overall trend in the profession was still plain.⁶⁰

The rise of the consensus school limited the political range of scholarship text writers would draw upon, but it involved no coercion. The

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postwar hunt for communist influence in the schools did, and it contributed to a growing spirit of self-censorship initially triggered by the Rugg controversy. The House Committee on Un-American Activities and its state-level counterparts like the Tenney Committee in California targeted both colleges and high schools. Teachers grew reluctant to question the country's economic system and its government policy or to encourage students to think too critically themselves, because a whiff of subversion could bring a subpoena to appear before such committees. In New York City and Los Angeles, teachers who invoked the Fifth Amendment and refused to testify about their political affiliations or to "name names" automatically lost their jobs.⁶¹

Investigators scrutinized schoolbooks with as much ardor as they questioned teachers. Richard Combs, a lawyer with another California legislative committee investigating communist influence in the schools, found a time-saving technique to scan for inappropriate material in a book series called "Building America." He simply cross-checked names in the index with lists of suspected radicals. But when he found what even he deemed "plain, forceful, and direct" denunciations of communism in the books, he concluded that someone had simply inserted them to offset more subtle left-wing bias. In a catch-22 worthy of Joseph Heller, the books were thus still "unfit for use in our schools." In Indiana, a member of the state textbook board vowed to drive any mention of Robin Hood from approved titles. She was sure communists were exploiting the take-from-the-rich-and-give-to-the-poor theme to corrupt America's youth.⁶²

Alabama put the greatest effort into cleaning up its curricular materials. In 1953 its legislature passed Act 888, which required publishers supplying texts to schools in the state to certify that none of the books' authors, or even writers cited for additional reading, was "a known advocate of communism or Marxist Socialism" or had belonged to the Communist Party or a "Communist front organization." The act would have hamstringed authors trying to write about radical politics, social class, or virtually anything else, but it was so sweeping that courts struck it down. Nevertheless, the act brought a chill to the publishing industry. And Alabama did not act alone. Between 1958 and 1962, well after the height of McCarthyism had passed, legislatures in over one-third of the states mounted probes of texts or attacked them in some other way.⁶³

Many of the individuals and groups leading the assault on texts in the 1950s were veterans of the campaign against Rugg. Their complaints had not changed much. They objected to explicit discussion of

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social class and depictions of poverty. Critics testifying before a textbook committee in Texas, for instance, complained about how one book reported that prosperous people in the antebellum South had once looked upon small farmers as "poor white trash." A political cartoon they wanted removed from another text for leaving an "extremely unwanted impression" showed a destitute family in the Panic of 1893. The Daughters of the American Revolution found fault with "uncomplimentary" photographs of slums and Depression-era lines of the unemployed.⁶⁴

Critics on the right also returned to the charge that histories promoted collectivism, pointing to coverage of government antipoverity programs or simply the growth of state power in general. The catalyst for Alabama's textbook law of 1953 was not the inclusion of radicals but, apparently, the mention of public housing, which annoyed Birmingham real-estate interests. The leader of Texans for America objected to allegedly favorable remarks on the federal income tax, farm subsidies, and welfare programs. Another Texan protested that a popular textbook called *Land of Freedom* failed to state that Social Security was "evil."⁶⁵

Many publishers were eager to placate the right. Told by critics in the Lone Star state to drop the names of seven alleged subversives from their junior high American history, representatives from the firm of Lyons and Carnahan answered that if the charges were true, they were "not only willing but anxious to delete any references to such persons in *Freedom's Frontier* or any of our publications." But if failure to denounce programs like Social Security as creeping socialism was somehow biased, even the most pliable publishers found themselves in a quandary. As the education editor of the *New York Herald Tribune* remarked in 1952, it "frequently turns out that the charge of *advocacy* of change results from a *recording* of change that has already taken place." The exasperated vice president of Macmillan's education department made the same point. "To a stout defender of *laissez-faire*," he wrote in *Phi Delta Kappan*, mention of "the most even-tempered facts of past history or of contemporary life may brand [an] author as a 'collectivist' or a 'subversive.'"⁶⁶

Could a textbook dealing with recent American history just sidestep the New Deal? Not really. And now that economic reforms of the 1930s had become institutionalized, supported even by the moderate Republican Dwight Eisenhower, text writers could not condemn them without appearing to attack the federal government and the will of voters. That, of course, would have amounted to "subversion." So textbooks

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generally shoehorned the New Deal into a narrative of American progress. One such book included a series of one-page features illustrating "Milestones of Democracy." It included a double tribute to "The Right of Working People to Organize," recognized under the Wagner Act of 1935, and to "Social Security." Accompanying photographs showed a meeting of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and a smiling, elderly couple holding a government check, their figures backlit by soft, soothing light.⁶⁷ Much to the frustration of critics on the right, the activist state and the cause of humanitarian nationalism had made significant gains in popular textbooks, even though Rugg had gone down in defeat.

Despite the risks involved, a few authors and editors also consciously chose to grapple with class. In *History of a Free People*, Henry W. Bragdon, a teacher at a private school in New England, dared to explain how Americans split along class lines during the Revolution and the debate over ratifying the Constitution. Though his tone was considerably less strident than Rugg's had been, the essence of the account was the same. The book included a discussion of Jefferson's disputes with Hamilton, along with the latter's desire for a government of the rich and well born that would keep the "swinish multitude" under control. Editors tried to fortify the courage of history instructors who must have been tempted to treat the two Founders with bland reverence, rather than to explore their philosophical and frequently personal conflicts. Bragdon and his editors also juxtaposed photographs of a Vanderbilt mansion and a turn-of-the-century tenement, its residents staring hollow-eyed at the camera. The two authors of another book openly addressed the "problems" that industrial capitalism engendered. The rise of corporations, they wrote, "gave a few men power over millions of workers and consumers. They often used their power to keep wages down and prices up, to crush attempts of labor to organize, and to dictate to state legislatures and even Congress itself."⁶⁸

Textbook writers and editors could never afford simply to ignore complaints from conservative critics, however. Instead, they tried to blend liberal and humanitarian ideas and to restore the faith in economic opportunity and class mobility that Rugg had challenged. In their new synthesis, one critical element in Rugg's books—the importance of class and conflict between classes, particularly in recent history—partially faded away. The revised story of America did not always please the American Legion or critics like E. Merrill Root. Root, a curious figure who balanced careers as a poet, respected scholar on the work of Robert Frost, and hired-gun in right-wing cam-

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paigns to clean up the schools, published a 1938 work called *Brainwashing in the High Schools* that argued that the United States was losing the Cold War due to a collectivist bias that historians implanted in young people.⁶⁹ He was especially vexed by textbooks' alleged favoritism toward the New Deal. Despite complaints from Root and others, however, it is clear that texts of the era still relied on several traditional, conservative themes.

First, they told students that contemporary relations between labor and management were based mostly on consensus and mutual respect, not antagonism. The 1952 edition of Gertrude Hartman's *America: Land of Freedom* prefaced a discussion of strikes in the nineteenth century with a note that many "employers in the early days were opposed to labor unions," a verbal sleight of hand that ignored intense business hostility to unions under the New Deal. That ill will had led to repeated Republican attempts to overturn the Wagner Act and to undermine labor's gains. The GOP achieved a partial victory by rolling back some of the legislation's provisions in 1947 under the Taft-Hartley Act. Politically messy as the conflict over Taft-Hartley had been, it was too significant for Hartman to ignore outright. So she slipped into the passive voice. "During the period of labor unrest after the war," she informed her young readers, "it was felt that the Wagner Act had given labor unions too much power." *Who* felt that way? *Which* unions had gained too much power? Hartman avoided giving her young readers specific answers. Accompanying illustrations failed to clarify issues, offering instead staged images of satisfied workers and peaceful labor-management negotiations. They included a photograph of two smiling men preparing to punch their time cards. The caption told readers that American workers "now go to their jobs each day knowing exactly the hours they are going to work and the pay they will receive." Other authors were more honest when discussing Taft-Hartley and labor-management disputes, but the general pattern of minimizing recent social conflict was unmistakable.⁷⁰

In their 1954 text *Our Nation's Story*, Everett Augspurger, a Cleveland high school teacher, and Richard A. McLenore, a professor at Mississippi Southern College, showed an almost Orwellian tendency to omit troublesome facts of recent labor history. A 1937 strike "accompanied by some violence in Chicago led to the recognition of the United Steel Workers Union," according to the authors.⁷¹ The account is accurate to a point, but euphemistic, neglecting to explain what sort of violence or even what company was involved. Republic Steel had, in fact, enlisted the support of local police, who then fired on a peaceful

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crowd, killing ten people, an event known in labor circles as the Memorial Day Massacre. The book's abbreviated account, however, served several purposes. It allowed the writers to hew to the narrative of progress, one that relied, to the annoyance of conservatives, on gains by unions. But it also obscured underlying class conflict, which generally pleased those same critics. The story of the strike was thus "balanced" in a way that avoided offending adoption boards, particularly in Illinois, where memories of the strike were still fresh. But faith in progress is inherently conservative, for it makes committed struggle or radical alterations in the status quo unnecessary. Books like *Our Nation's Story* implied that, given the chance, time solves all social problems.

In books of the 1950s, the federal government also solved them. Textbooks typically treated the government as a benevolent, disinterested force acting on its own initiative to protect the interests of labor, business, and other groups. The historian Allan Nevins prefaced Hartman's book with the claim that American history "is a story of how a passion for social justice led American statesmen, one after another, to try to make sure that no one would be ill-fed or ill-housed, no one would be hungry, no one would lack a chance to work and use his talents." That theme surfaced repeatedly in Hartman's text, as in this typically soporific passage:

Because of the importance of the working people in the life of the nation, the government became interested in their welfare.

As early as 1884 a Bureau of Labor was organized to collect and publish information on labor matters, and in 1913, during the administration of President Wilson, a Department of Labor was established to "foster, promote, and develop the welfare of wage-earners of the United States, to improve their working conditions, and to advance their opportunities for profitable employment."⁷²

As statesmen or a disembodied government took center stage in the narrative, social activists receded. Solutions to poverty or social conflict descended from above in Hartman's book; or, at least, the federal government earnestly searched for them. Unlike Rugg, Hartman downplayed physical and political conflict as a route to progress. So, while she devoted this paragraph to the creation of the Department of Labor in 1913, she omitted the better-known and perhaps equally important story of striking miners and their families who were killed by company

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agents the following year in Ludlow, Colorado. Textbook authors rarely suggested that violence could provide the necessary constructive tension to sway public opinion and produce change, as the deaths at Ludlow did. *Our Nation's Story* implied that violence retarded reform. "Despite outcroppings of industrial violence" at the turn of the century, its writers concluded, "workers' benefits such as the eight-hour day, which we now take for granted, were introduced."⁷³

Textbooks in the postwar era made massive government intervention in the economy seem both natural and, as Nevins argues, humanitarian. Rugg, however, had justified centralized economic reform by showing readers contemporary poverty and lack of opportunity. His successors removed those elements from their discussion of the United States at midcentury, fostering an impression that no economic reform beyond what had already been accomplished by the New Deal was necessary.

"The most notable fact about the nation's increased wealth is that it has come to be shared by more and more people," claimed the authors of one history. "Never before had so many Americans enjoyed so much prosperity," added another. Americans had gained "a standard of living such as the world had never before known," said a third. Poverty appeared in the books only as an ill-defined problem that was being overcome through existing government programs. *The Making of Modern America*, written by professional historian Leon H. Canfield and social studies teacher Howard B. Wilder, paired pictures of an urban slum with a new housing project. "Light, air, and cleanliness," read the caption, "have begun to replace the dinginess and squalor of earlier low-cost houses."⁷⁴

There were a few exceptions to this policy. Canfield and Wilder's text, first published in the more experimental 1930s as *The United States in the Making*, allowed that not "all American families have sufficient income to provide them with acceptable standards of living." But in the 1958 version, that concession came with a Cold War-inspired preface that showed, with text, graphs, and a seemingly endless parade of tractors, that even the poorest American workman was far ahead of his Soviet counterpart. "He needs to work far fewer hours than a Russian citizen works to buy food and clothing for his family," the authors assured young readers. "Because of this advantage the American can afford to enjoy many things that are beyond the reach of workers in many other lands."⁷⁵

The University of Wisconsin endured as a redoubt of conflict-oriented labor historians and freethinkers even during the McCarthyist 1950s, but one would never guess so when reading *Living in Our Amer-*

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ica, a text by Wisconsin's Edward Krug. In the book's concluding chapter, Krug and Stanford coauthor I. James Quillen took an extraordinarily gentle look at problems like poor housing, inadequate health care, and unequal opportunities. Easygoing cheerfulness characterized much of their tone, as suggested by an excerpt they included from comedian Bob Hope's 1946 book *So This is Peace*: "There's an endless string of new things coming along and old things growing more mellow just as there has always been and always will be." Yet Quillen and Krug also took the issue of social and economic progress quite seriously. For them, such progress was both inscrutably mystical and undeniably concrete. In *Living in Our America*, the country's history culminated in a scene that illustrated the optimistic, socially unified fantasy of the 1950s—a massive, low-slung automobile plant where vehicles in the parking lot stretched toward the horizon. The editors even included a poem in free verse to explain the photograph:

In the United States can be found factories
with parking lots full of automobiles—
not just cars of officials and factory owners,
but cars of the workmen, too.

The cars are more than simple "pieces of machinery," according to the poem:

They are symbols, too, that their owners are free—
free to live in city, town, or country,
free to move on to other work,
free to seek other ways of life,
free in body and spirit.⁷⁶

In sentiment, this passage recalled one from John McMaster's history from the 1880s, when he invited readers to imagine themselves careering across the country in a luxurious train—only now the railroad car was replaced by the privately owned automobile. Quillen and Krug thus reaffirmed a textbook theme that stretched back several decades. Technological progress benefits all Americans, "not just officials and factory owners," and because its fruits are shared more or less equally, it undermines the very idea of class itself. When Ruggs began writing his books in the 1920s, he wanted to explore how industrialization challenged key American beliefs in social justice and political equality. In the 1950s, these postwar histories declared, such chal-

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lenges had finally been overcome, in large part during the critical era encompassing the 1930s and World War II.

In a section that began with the bold-faced heading "Social and economic problems interest Americans," two authors summed up the lessons of the previous thirty years:

The mid-century American was sensitive to the problems of society. The Great Depression had taught him how interdependent Americans in every walk of life were. He had learned, from bitter experience, that suffering in one part of the nation affected the whole nation. He had come to believe that when people were not prosperous, it was the task of all the people to discover the cause and eliminate it.⁷⁷

Here, we see the middle-class bias that pervaded the texts. The epiphany that this hypothetical citizen achieved is probably *not* that he and others like him needed the aid of the rest of the nation. Despite a reference to "all the people," the statement suggested a sense of charity; acting through the instruments of the state, he would now help others. Like much in the books, it smoothed over some of the rough edges of social conflict that lead to progress. It also invited all readers to imagine themselves as middle-class, blurring social divisions tied to income, wealth, and education. Again, the contrast to Rugg, with his portraits of Mr. Very Poor Man and Mr. Prosperous Business Man, is unmistakable.

Images of America as middle-class, or simply classless, recurred frequently in texts from the 1950s. The middle class of the early twentieth century, noted Canfield and Wilder, "gave America its real tone and quality" and provided "those who made real contributions to American life and culture." When they addressed labor issues in contemporary America, writers avoided the term "working class." Bragdon and McCurthen maintained that even in the 1930s there had been "few class distinctions in America," a claim at odds with much of their own, generally straightforward text. A less sophisticated book argued that the "absence of class distinctions" marked colonial America and that "this characteristic has continued to be one of the finest features of American life." Another book showed a White mother preparing a meal for her two children in a spacious, modern kitchen, its countertops and numerous appliances buffed to a silvery sheen. "The kitchen scene above gives some indication of the modern American standard of living," read the caption. Illustrations of "typical" dress at different

periods of American history, a motif in the books, invariably showed men and women of middle or above-average income. Where depictions of variations in wealth and income of contemporary Americans did appear, they were usually accompanied by cheerful reminders about equality of opportunity, the prime leveling force in society. Critics of Rugg had claimed that he "deliberately pursued" the "building of class consciousness" in his schoolbooks. It would be difficult to make the same charge against books of the 1950s, unless they made children conscious that they were part of the great American middle class.⁷⁸

These rosy pictures were accurate to some degree. Americans did enjoy unprecedented prosperity in the 1950s. Labor consolidated its gains from earlier decades, and the federal government, working with the states, undertook modest efforts to help the poor. Those factors led to a more even distribution of the nation's wealth, especially when contrasted with conditions in the 1920s and early 1930s. But the story of progress missed critical facts. The New Deal tended to benefit those groups, like organized labor, that already had some access to governmental power. For instance, relatively prosperous farmers benefited more from aid than poor ones. In a paradox that deeply troubled some of Roosevelt's advisors, federal programs actually made it more profitable for large landowners in the South to drive out their sharecroppers.⁷⁹ Few textbooks mentioned such facts, leaving the impression that the noble impulses of humanitarian nationalism had largely solved the riddle of inequality in the 1930s. Now that citizens knew that "suffering in one part of the nation affected the whole nation," that chapter of domestic history seemed over. The hopes of benevolent statesmen had been fulfilled.

There was still plenty of inequality in the 1950s, of course, but students would not see it in their histories. Pictures of unheated Appalachian shacks, crumbling urban tenements, or impoverished Indian reservations would have shown the persistence of poverty over generations, directly challenging the myth of Horatio Alger that still filled these books. The dearth of such scenes reflected both the limited knowledge of some writers and a conscious decision to avoid offending adoption boards. The shock brought on by the "discovery" of poverty after the publication of Michael Harrington's *The Other America* in 1962 stemmed from its erasure from the popular imagination. The textbooks used by a generation of middle-class students played an important role in that forgetfulness.

It is easy to lampoon the monotonous self-assurance of so many

aspects of popular culture from the 1950s, from magazine advertisements for washing machines, their knobs and dials caressed by attentive models, to television programs like "Father Knows Best," which dispensed platitudes in a convenient, half-hour format. Textbooks, too, offered generally positive messages steeped in visions of material plenty. Yet while the books distorted the national story through a combination of evasion and political compromise, they still retained a certain ideological coherence. The story they told about America, as they told it, generally made sense. That sense of order would not last. The shape of things to come could be glimpsed one day in 1962 as J. Evetts Haley, the leader of a conservative watchdog group, lectured a committee of the Texas legislature.

A successful rancher and businessman, Haley and other members of his organization shared views typical of right-wing critics who had gravitated to the textbook issue in the years after Rugg's defeat, though he was, perhaps, a bit more colorful (he had once slugged a professor who criticized HUAC). They wanted books to devote more space to traditional military, political, and business heroes and to remove muckrakers and social critics like Ida Tarbell and Upton Sinclair. They preferred that histories not present Social Security and labor unions favorably, and they did not want texts to dwell on disparities of income and wealth. After Haley finished his litany of such complaints and recommendations, one member of the legislature, Mexican-American John Alaniz, wanted a clarification.

"You object to the mentioning of social classes in these books?" he asked.

Exactly, Haley replied, because the lack of class distinction was "why your people and mine came to this country."

Alaniz stared back at him for several seconds, betraying no emotion. Then, "Mr. Haley, part of my people were here already."⁸⁰

The committee room erupted in laughter. Even Haley's supporters joined in, seeing how unconscious assumptions about race, class, and U.S. history had suddenly made the man look foolish. Over the next decade, similarly awkward scenes would play out across the country as people of color, particularly African-Americans, demanded larger and much revised roles in textbooks. The America imagined by histories of the 1950s—united across class lines, tolerant, blessed by equal opportunity for all, and ever looking forward—would threaten to unravel as authors and publishers were forced to confront the legacy of race. It began in Detroit.