

## 10. Of Time and the Textbooks

Is the latest textbook necessarily the most up-to-date? Twelve new (since mid-1956) textbooks on basic national government were found to contain little or no reference to two new developments of some import. The author concludes that the latest text provides instructors with no reliable substitute for individual initiative in keeping informed.

Social scientists generally use the latest textbooks. It is assumed that there is an advantage in a book of recent vintage--that the latest material is included in the latest book. This assumption seemed worth testing, albeit in an unscientific and comparatively unsystematic way.

Two items of information were selected as tests of the time lag inherent in the publishing process. Without thought of praise or blame it was assumed that some advantage would result from such an investigation of inclusion of material in recent textbooks. Two basic items of different levels of specificity were chosen as tests.

One item was a very specific, low-level datum. The Supreme Court of the United States has traditionally met on Saturday for a conference date. Beginning with the fall of 1955 the Court changed this practice and began to meet for its conference on Friday. This was announced on June 6, 1955. (See 349 U. S. 971 [1955].) Since the Court had traditionally met on Saturday and had been doing so for a number of years, the item was well publicized in the newspapers and even in scholarly publications.

The second item was a more challenging and basic one. Robert Brown has now published two books in which he presents his interpretation of the colonial period. One of them, Middle-Class Democracy in Revolutionary Massachusetts, was a prize-winning book selected by the American Historical Association. The other is a direct challenge to Charles Beard and his economic interpretation of the

Constitution. Both works form a compact patterned whole and are part of Brown's fundamental re-evaluation of colonial and revolutionary America. It is Brown's contention that, in fact, the colonial period saw no great extremes of wealth and poverty, but rather that it was a middle-class society in which most men owned property. In line with this and as essentially proving his thesis, Brown contends that the right to vote in the revolutionary period was much more widely distributed than has been usually assumed. The property requirements that are made so much of in most writings were, according to him, nominal and reasonable ones that could be met by most people in this middle-class society. Mr. Brown thus challenges not only the Beard thesis, but also the works of A. M. Schlesinger, Sr., and F. J. Jameson, as well as the writings of A. E. McKinley. The crux of Mr. Brown's argument hinges upon his contention that demographically only from nineteen to twenty per cent of the population were adult males. Thus the estimates that 12-18% of the population could vote meant that up to 90% of the adult white males were franchised.

Although Brown is an historian, his works were fairly widely reviewed and evaluated. He received a rather unusual compliment, for example, in having his two books reviewed back-to-back in The American Political Science Review in December of 1956. Certainly an argument that from eighty to ninety per cent of the adult white males could vote in the post-Revolutionary period is a challenging one and one that compels at-

tention by the political scientist.

Twelve textbooks on basic national government were selected as the sample for this study. They included the most recent version of the texts by the following: Bailey and Associates; Binkley and Moos; Bruce; Burns and Peltason; Carr and Associates; DeGrazia; Ewing; Ferguson and McHenry; Gosnell and Associates; Maxey and Fluno; McCamy; and Young's Ogg and Ray. These included all basic textbooks available at the time of the inquiry and all but one of those currently advertised in The American Political Science Review. All books chosen had a copyright date of 1956 or beyond, and others indicating that they had been written in the early part of 1956 were not considered.

Of the even dozen textbooks, nine still discussed Saturday as the conference date for the Supreme Court, two had no mention of the time of conference, and only one had correctly stated the date as Friday. The text that included the Friday date was not the latest book in time.

A further issue developing out of the study of the conference was the indication that, in book after book, the discussion of the Supreme Court's conference was a rather close paraphrase of an article by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., which had appeared in Fortune magazine some time ago. Since Schlesinger's article was highly interpretative, the point of view expressed by him also tended to be reflected in these treatments. Fully half of the textbooks thus had been treating the Court in the terms set by Schlesinger's article.

More interesting is the failure of any textbook to wholly absorb the material in Brown's two books. Only one textbook of our twelve mentions Brown at all, and this only as a direct confrontation by Brown of the Beard thesis. No book includes Brown's data on voting behavior. To be sure, of the twelve textbooks only six deal directly with history

and historical statements on voting. A number of others do have generalized statements (mostly on the order of quotations from people of the time rather than statistics on voting), and thus they might find the Brown material not directly relevant to their own treatment. On the other hand, half of the books do have statements with regard to the extent of voting and thus presumably should have found the material appropos.

In one instance an author did present the new information with regard to voting behavior in the teaching manual that was later prepared to accompany the textbook. However, since in the manual he gave no indication of the source of his correction, the statement could not serve as a stimulus to either teacher or student to further understand the implications of this new argument.

A check of four textbooks in American political parties published since 1956 also shows no inclusion of the Brown material, although three of the books had the results of previous research on this question.

Those works that included data on voting were scrupulously fair and, on the whole, extremely accurate in presenting the figures and in drawing no further conclusions from them than were justified by the facts as stated. In general they showed a very high level of scholarship in dealing with already established facts and interpretations. The inclusion of newer material apparently presented a more difficult problem, however.

Even where the author was a specialist in the sub-section of political science in which the item was relevant this proved no advantage in its inclusion in the textbook. This proved to be the case in both instances in our inquiry.

In sum, it would appear that the exigencies of book publishing and the flow of events is such that

no textbook can be assumed to incorporate even all of the leading changes of recent vintage in the field. In the end, the teacher must rely upon his information and knowledge to supplement the textbook. The time lag between manuscript and book, the time lag between event and incorporation is such that there is inevitable delay in bringing in new material. The task of covering an entire

field of learning is such that it is difficult to spot immediately those new items that bear upon the totality of the text as it exists and incorporate the material. In the end, the teacher must, through his own creative efforts, bear the responsibility of bringing to his students the newest and the best in modern research.

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## 11. Annotated BIBLIOGRAPHY on Political Research

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