

Newsletter

Providers of Textbook Information • PO Box 7518 • Longview, TX 75607-7518 • 903/753-5993 • fax 903/753-7788 • e-mail TxtbkRevws@aol.com • May 1999

Textbook industry cynicism

Publishers seek cover as Gablers identify 379 factual errors

Publishers thought they had fixed their factual-error problem in the five principal high school World History books they submitted for 1999 local Texas adoption. How wrong they were, you saw on ABC *20/20* April 2, when we unrolled an almost 55-foot list of factual errors we found in these books. Now those companies support a proposal that *immunizes them from fines* for missing factual errors, inviting more of them in the future.

The 379 factual errors we found there included confused chronologies, garbled geography, discrepant dates, false descriptions, wrong narratives, imaginary events, and contradictions in the same book. Publishers could easily have caught most of this, had one historian (not mere proofreaders) read their whole text. In 1991 we found only 14 more factual errors in twice as many U.S. History books our first time through them.

Back then, publishers said the U.S. History factual-errors fiasco was a one-time fluke and accepted the fines. This time they want to dodge them. They favor a proposal before Texas' State Board of Education that "penalties should not be assessed for errors that are identified during the adoption process or even those identified after adoption" — a virtual insurance policy exempting them from identifying their own factual errors at all.

Under this license to err, not identifying their own factual errors saves publishers the cost of correcting them and, if others find them, publishers still avoid fines unless they afterward fail to correct them ... as they sometimes do. Among publishers' excuses in the public record for not making right identified errors they promised to correct are "editorial difficulties resulting from a merger" and "oversight on the part of the publisher."

"The publishers ... *care deeply* about education and about the quality of the instructional materials they produce. ... The school-children of Texas, and every other state, *deserve no less.*"

— Nicholas Veliotes, president, Association of American Publishers, *Dallas Morning News*, January 10, 1993, p. 11-J (*italics added*)

Publishers, nonplussed at their failed "reforms," want to avoid the consequences of repeating their mistakes. Last January a World History textbook editor asked how we found so many errors in his book, which he thought was clean. We said, "If we promise to tell you the truth, do you promise to believe it?" He agreed. We said, "Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior. Each day we ask Him to show us the errors, and He does."

"And technical perfection, even if attainable, is *not a sound goal in textbooks.*"

— Association of American Publishers press release, November 1992, p. 2 (*italics added*)