

The Patchwork of World History in Texas High Schools: Unpacking Eurocentrism, Imperialism, and Nationalism in the Curriculum, 1920-2021. Stephen Jackson. New York/London: Routledge, 2022. Routledge Research in Decolonizing Education Series. xi + 208 pp. \$53. Paperback ISBN-13: 9781032347738.

Stephen Jackson's *The Patchwork of World History* is a fine example of careful archival work and focused analysis around a narrow, coherent, and significant set of questions. Examining a century's worth of curricular plans, standards, legislation, and textbooks, as well as a solid collection of related scholarship on pedagogy, historiography, and local politics, Jackson explicates a history of unrealized potential and chauvinism, a nuanced study that is nonetheless an indictment. Efficiently written—about 120 pages of text, with substantial notes and bibliography attached to each individual chapter, and appendices for data—clear and easy to follow, this is clearly intended to be read by those of us who teach teachers, as well as to be assigned to teachers in training who need perspective on what they are getting into.

The introduction lays out the plan of attack and notes core issues, including how World History as a course is “overstuffed” but considered essential in the modern age. Jackson makes the case that Texas was an early adopter and a bellwether state, not to mention having a more coherent archival collection than most. The College Board's Advanced Placement World History may be historiographically and pedagogically superior, if still overstuffed, but is only experienced by a fifth of the students who take the normal World History course. Academics have not paid close attention to secondary curricula, assuming too often that they track post-secondary trends; testing that thesis reveals important patterns and forces that the academy has not effectively addressed.

The next two chapters track the development of the World History course. The first starts with the interwar years, and the contest between World History as a history course and the nascent interdisciplinary social studies model with thematic and problem-oriented approaches. Most texts still privileged Western Civ and post-1500 history, even progressive global works. Texas's 1949 standards were the epitome of Eurocentric, pro-Christian, anti-communist, conservative history, but even they afforded some attention to anti-imperial movements. At that point a wave of more global and multicultural texts developed, some of which took a regional and anthropological approach.

The next chapter picks up the story in the 1980s with a clash of opposing, if not equally powerful, forces: the World History Association, founded in 1982, and the conservative moral panic against progressive and multicultural education starting with the Reagan administration's *Nation At Risk* report. This is when the “regional chapters in epochal sections” textbook format became the norm; selection committee standards drove the inclusion of more and more material, diversifying the story but making the textbooks unreadable except as reference works. Each iteration of the state standards became more political than the last, initiating testing regimens in the 1980s, the National History Standards Project fiasco in the 1990s, and the highly partisan and nationally embarrassing 2010 edition (the most extreme positions got “streamlined” out in 2018).

The next three chapters track persistent themes. The first looks at pervasive Eurocentrism, showing that the outright Western supremacy of early work was not eliminated so much as transformed into subtler euphemistic language. Assumptions of linear progress—Jackson never uses the term “whiggish history” and eschews a lot of other theoretical language as well—always put European and American civilization at the forefront and non-Western societies were depicted as “sleepy” or “stagnant” with tradition. “Modernization” replaced “Westernization” as the measure of success, but both were effectively synonyms signifying democratization, industrialization, and capitalism. Jackson uses the Ottoman Empire and Meiji Japan as exemplars of how Eurocentrism distorts non-Western history, the former perpetually in decline until Atatürk’s reforms, and the latter a success story of aggressive Westernization, both hampered by attachment to non-Western traditions like Islam and Imperial Shinto.

The next chapter looks at imperialism and highlights Anglo-American exceptionalism. As with everything else, there is some nuance over the years, starting with Jackson’s surprise that US overseas acquisitions in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century were consistently labeled imperialism; neither American continental expansion nor informal empire over Latin America nor global Cold War interventions were ever given the same frank treatment. In fact, US hegemony over the Americas is portrayed as anti-imperialistic protection, and Kipling’s “White Man’s Burden” is cited unironically in the early twentieth century as evidence that acquisition of Cuba, the Philippines, Hawaii, etc., marked America’s rise to global prominence. Colonialized cultures were described as “sleepy” and imperialism as “a wake-up call”; resistance to imperialism was justification for violence, while conquest and subjugation were largely bloodless events. In the later years, anti-imperial movements and decolonization were described as a kind of graduation, marking non-Western societies’ absorption of the Western gifts of nationalism and democracy. From the 1970s on, after the great waves of decolonization, imperialism was often presented through pro and con cost-benefit exercises, as part of a narrative of modernization.

The final subject is presentism, how textbooks have tried to connect history to the recent past, addressing critical issues of contemporary society. These meditations on current events often harken back to the core purposes of the course, inculcating values and active citizenship, and are intended to show students how the history they have learned connects to the challenges they face. American capitalist democracy is presumed to be the pinnacle of human evolution, and challenges to that version of modernity are usually highlighted, especially communism. The conflation of capitalism with democracy, and resistance with a failure to Westernize, makes discussion of developments like post-Tiananmen China awkward, but for the most part cases that do not fit the model are omitted.

It’s true, as Jackson points out, that there is a disconnect between Texas World History curricula and current historiography, and there always has been, and if there is any hope of bridging the gap, we need to know that it exists and why it persists. History is one of the few secondary (much less primary) level subjects where the content *could* be the same at every level, even if the pedagogical choices are different; whether it *should* be the same is a different set of questions, but history may have the biggest gap between what field experts understand and what is taught, outside

of sex ed. A student recently commented to me that it was weird reading about lived events in a history book. I refrained from pointing out that I remember things currently celebrating half-century anniversaries. But it is particularly discomfiting to read what is basically a history of your career and be so disappointed. Stephen Jackson's analysis is about secondary education, but the students who pass through these curricula end up in our post-secondary survey classes, and many of the textbooks he analyzes have college-level equivalents.

The fights over public education values and programs have spilled over into higher education, and not just at public institutions. Coincidentally, this review was written almost immediately after reading David Austin Walsh's *Taking America Back: The Conservative Movement and the Far Right* (Yale UP, 2024), which addresses how institutions and finances help maintain extreme views within respectable contexts and allows them footholds in mainstream publishing and politics. What is particularly frustrating about this history is that the precise moment when things should have gotten better, the 1982 founding of the World History Association as a way for the field to focus attention and advocate for deeper understanding, is also when the backlash against progressive education, multiculturalism, and multivocal nuanced understandings began to drive policy and pedagogy.

Structurally, the vast majority of states still offer a "Western Civ Plus" course, and the lack of explicit teacher training in the field—or even requirements that teachers have substantial coursework in history at all—means that textbooks are "more critical in a World History class than other historical subject areas" (11). This is almost as true at the post-secondary level, where the assumption is still that any historian who does not specialize in the US should be teaching World History surveys, despite the lack of serious distribution requirements or training in most graduate programs. I have often commented to my students on the tautology of the World History course: because it is expected that the course will provide cultural literacy as well as historical skills, our standards, textbooks, and syllabi overemphasize exactly the same Western Civilization that we decry as a distortion, because without having a strong grasp on the standard frame of reference, how can our students engage with current political or economic or social debates?

Jackson's conclusion suggests that World Historians need a stronger coalition to push back against the traditionalists, and a clear argument for undistorted, sensitive, and complicated history, but does not offer a candidate. For too long we have thought that undistorted, sensitive, and complicated history was self-evidently justified and desirable. Jackson's history shows the institutional and cultural barriers to our progress.

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