

Teaching HP using the American History Textbook Project

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What is the AHTP Collection?

- Approximately 300 American history textbooks, ranging in coverage from 1825-2016
 - Full physical collection is available in the Library, as well as a [limited digital collection](#)
 - **Contains materials that can be used in most HP courses.** Readings are also typically shorter than a standard history and more manageable for students to evaluate.
- **PURPOSE**: allows students to examine how certain topics (or ideas) were treated over time, and the broader implications that these historical interpretations can have on society
- Books are used as “**artifacts**”

AHTP in Room LC 215



AHTP and Historiography

- Using AHTP, students are challenged to consider:
 - Whose story gets told?
 - Whose story gets left out?
 - Who is interpreting the story?
 - Who is consuming the story?
 - What happens when the story changes over time and between generations?
 - What implications does *change* or the *absence* of information have on broader issues?
Meaning, how does the past influence the present?

Typical Assignments

- Students pick a broad topic (ex. immigration, Civil Rights, genocide).
 - Students pick 2-5 textbooks
 - Students **compare topic content** within selected books and critically **evaluate** the **differences** and/or **similarities**, consider **why** it was written the way it was, and what **implications** it could have.
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While reviewing the textbooks, students consider

- Language used (positive, negative, neutral)
 - Where the book was used (if known)
 - What is used to “tell the story” (ex. images, statistics, which perspectives)
 - The absence of information (ex. Colonization without mentioning Native Americans)
 - What may have influenced how the narrative was written (ex. author, time period)
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Example: Slavery

Objective: Critically interpret history and society

Outcomes:

- Interpret appropriate sources
- Understand historiography and its implications for the use of sources

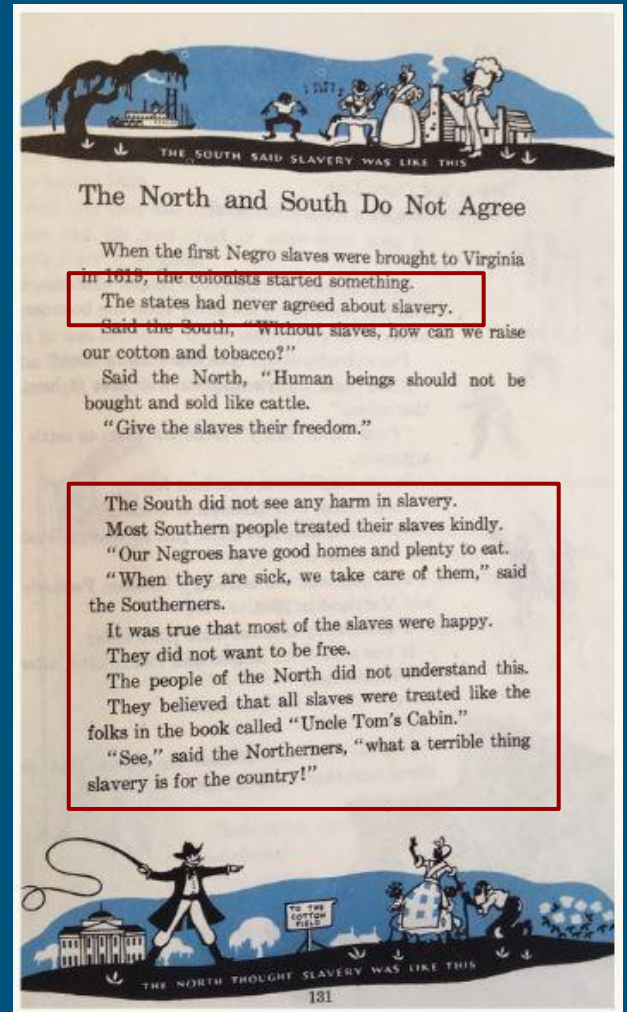
PROMPT: What is this excerpt saying?

- Slaves were happy (presented as a fact - "It was true...")
- Southerners treated their slaves well
- The North never approved of slavery

PROMPT: Think about:

- What could have influenced this narrative?
- How could this shape a reader's understanding of slavery?

Our America, 1945



Example: Slavery

PROMPT: What is this excerpt saying?


- Slaves toiled “from dawn to dusk” - men, women, and children
- Slaves who lived on small farms labored next to their owners.
- Provides a slave’s perspective
- Differentiates rural from urban slavery (not pictured)

PROMPT: Think about:

- What could have influenced this narrative?
- How could this shape a reader’s understanding of slavery?

The Americans (NJ Edition), 2008

Life Under Slavery



After 1830, Americans hotly debated the issue of slavery, but many African Americans still lived in bondage. In fact, the population of slaves in America had nearly doubled in the years between 1810 and 1830, growing from 1.2 million to roughly 2 million.

The institution of slavery had changed substantially since the 18th century. In those days, most slaves had recently arrived from the Caribbean or Africa and spoke one of several non-English languages. Most of these slaves worked on small farms alongside people with whom they could not easily communicate. By 1830, the majority had been born in America and spoke enough English to be able to communicate with other slaves. The rise of the plantation in the mid-18th century brought further change to the lives of the enslaved.

RURAL SLAVERY On large plantations, men, women, and even children toiled from dawn to dusk in the fields. The whip of the overseer or slave driver compelled them to work faster. Solomon Northup, who was born free and later enslaved, recalled the never-ending labor.

A PERSONAL VOICE SOLOMON NORTHUP

“The hands are required to be in the cotton field as soon as it is light in the morning, and, with the exception of ten or fifteen minutes, which is given them at noon to swallow their allowance of cold bacon, they are not permitted to be a moment idle until it is too dark to see, and when the moon is full, they often times labor till the middle of the night. They do not dare to stop even at dinner time, nor return to the quarters, however late it be, until the order to halt is given by the driver.”

By 1850 most slaves lived on plantations or large farms that employed ten or more slaves, but many lived on small farms, laboring beside their owners. Others lived and worked in the cities.

Thinking About It

Additional Resources

- [Digital AHTP](#) - links to select online versions of materials in the collection

- [AHTP Map](#) - useful resource if students want to know where books were used (**Note:** not all books are represented)

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Digital Access to the American History Textbook Project. At the top, there is a search bar and a navigation menu with links for Home, FAQ and Other Information, Accessing the Physical Collection, and various Full Access periods from the 19th to the 20th century. Below the navigation is an 'About this Guide' section with introductory text and contact information for Christina Cowner. A large banner features the text 'DIGITAL ACCESS TO THE AHTP COLLECTION' and 'American History Textbook Project Special Collection'. To the right, there is a 'FAQ' section with a question mark icon and an 'Assessment and Instruction Library' section with a photo of a woman holding books.



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Happy to provide assistance
accessing the collection, developing
assignments, and offering AHTP
sessions for students



Additional
example if needed

The Historiography in Textbooks Assignment used in HIST-150 History Matters

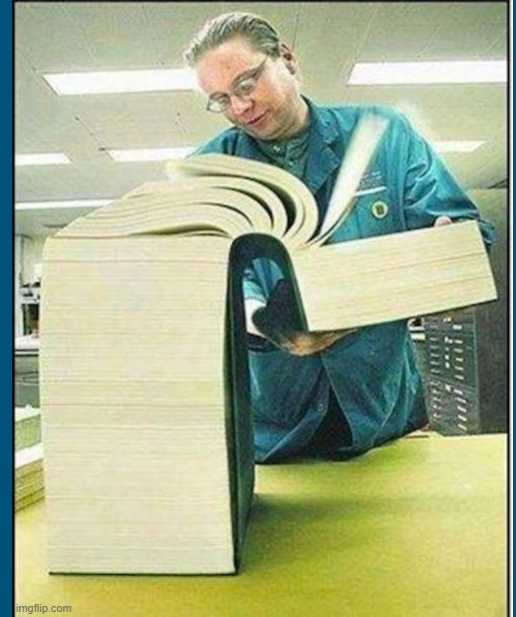
Look at 15-20 history textbook excerpts from the 19th century to the present.

Focus on how the authors describe Native American (First Nations) people.

Examples: terminology (“savages,” “red men,” etc.); population estimates (tiny versus huge); cultural achievements (none versus many); naming of actual tribes or individuals (Powhattan, Iroquois, etc.).

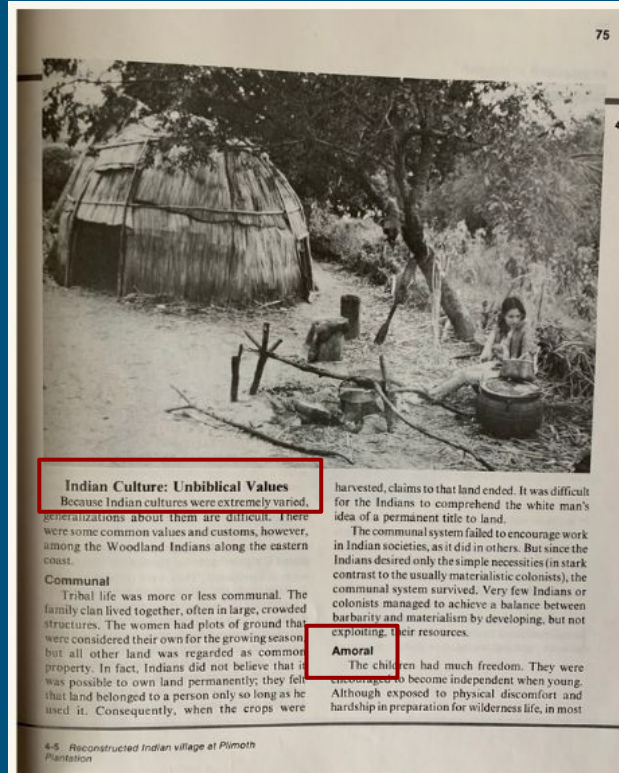
Write a short paper describing how these descriptions have changed over time, and suggesting reasons for the change.

What the history books
are gonna look like after 2020



(SHMIFOG)

Example: Native Americans



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Indian Culture: Unbiblical Values

Because Indian cultures were extremely varied, generalizations about them are difficult. There were some common values and customs, however, among the Woodland Indians along the eastern coast.

Communal

Tribal life was more or less communal. The family clan lived together, often in large, crowded structures. The women had plots of ground that were considered their own for the growing season but all other land was regarded as common property. In fact, Indians did not believe that it was possible to own land permanently; they felt that land belonged to a person only so long as he used it. Consequently, when the crops were

harvested, claims to that land ended. It was difficult for the Indians to comprehend the white man's idea of a permanent title to land.

The communal system failed to encourage work in Indian societies, as it did in others. But since the Indians desired only the simple necessities (in stark contrast to the usually materialistic colonists), the communal system survived. Very few Indians or colonists managed to achieve a balance between barbarity and materialism by developing, but not exploiting, their resources.

Amoral

The children had much freedom. They were encouraged to become independent when young. Although exposed to physical discomfort and hardship in preparation for wilderness life, in most