

The 1619 Project

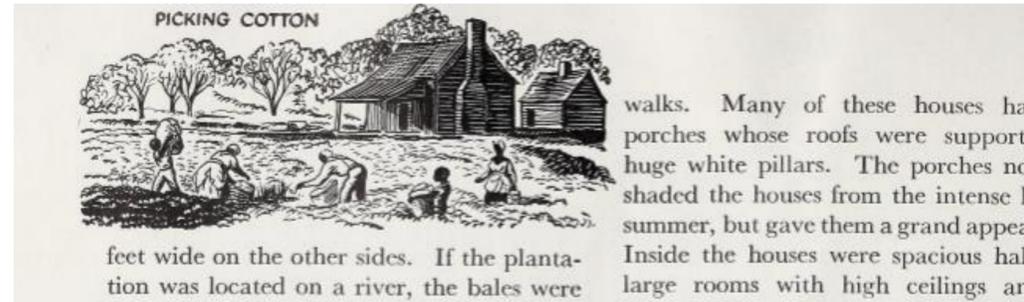
- Published in the August 14, 2019 issue of *The New York Times Magazine*
- Nikole Hannah-Jones long-form journalism collection
- The project's intention was to acknowledge the 400th anniversary of the first group of enslaved Africans arriving in the continental United States, on the coast of colonial Virginia in 1619.
- The full project was published in 100 pages with essays, photos and a collection of poems and fiction all within its pages, proving the importance of different mediums in the telling of American history.
- Since its publication, many have raised questions as to why the contents of the project are not commonly taught in the average American history school curriculum.
- The misinformation and erasure of history in schools' teachings causes BIPOC to dissociate from being a part of their own nation's history.

Thesis

While contemporary American history textbooks are moving towards a more inclusive speech when regarding slavery in the United States, the majority of Americans have learned from biased, intentionally indeterminate texts while enrolled in the American school system. This paper will examine the importance of history textbooks, revealing the deception and censorship of truthful Black history and the honest experiences of enslaved Africans in our nation's historical works with the importance and effect that textbooks have to stimulate "cultural osmosis" being confirmed.

American History Textbooks

- While there are earlier United States history textbooks published, American lexicographer Noah Webster is often mistakenly credited for writing the first American history textbook due to his 1841 work *Early American History* being one of the first standard texts specifically for schools.
- There weren't many texts recounting the history of the United States as many schools in the North focused on teaching the Bible.
- The 1911 publication *An American History* by David Muzzey was a widely-used textbook in history classes throughout the country.
- This text remained popular until the 1960s with the rise of the civil rights movement.
- One of the more infamous quotes publicized from his text comes from the sixth section, "The Crisis of Disunion." Muzzey wrote the hypothetical question, "Why did the Republican Congress of 1867 put upon the unbearable burden of negro rule supported by the bayonet?" (488).
- Other textbooks during this era dispensed similar views, where negativity towards Black people shined in their writing.
 - Dehumanizing language that suggests that they were a type of cattle that "adapt to farm labor."
- While we now recognize the agenda presented in texts like these, decades worth of students have been influenced by this writing
- which introduces the importance of highlighting the prejudice inscribed in older text during modern times.
- Christopher Edwards "The How of History: Using Old and New Textbooks in the Classroom to Develop Disciplinary Knowledge"
- We can now benefit from learning with these older texts as we can understand the mindset of historians during these troubling eras.
 - By "small group of individuals," Edwards is alluding to the focus of white male accomplishments in historical works. Historians wanted to have readers feel a sense of American pride when reading about their country, but this meant that many aspects of history were misshapen or removed as this would have painted the United States in a negative light. This is especially true in sections noting slavery, if included at all.



In the top left corner on page 286 in the 1954 edition of *This is America's Story*, a reproduction of a drawing titled "Picking Cotton" can be seen, and the name of this artwork presents the subject in focus. Five enslaved people are seen picking cotton on a plantation field with two homes and trees in the background. This visual was removed from the 1966 edition and was never rereaded.



On the bottom of the same page, a similar style piece named "Slave Dwellings" is placed. This shows four plantation homes with a few people working just outside of them. One works by the well of water while others carry and build items for the plantation owners. This image was altered in the 1966 edition and removed from the 1978 edition.



David Kennedy's 2011 textbook *The American Pageant: A History of the Republic*, page 611: "These two brothers and their families had escaped to Canada from the slave South during the Civil War. Returning to the United States in the 1880s, they took advantage of the Homestead Act to stake out farms in Custer County, Nebraska."

Black History Textbooks

- In response to the predisposed tellings of Black history, African American history textbooks became a developed genre by the end of the nineteenth century.
- One of the earliest African American focused texts was published 1891: Edward Johnson's *A School History of the Negro Race in America, from 1619 to 1890*.
- Leila Amos Pendleton's *A Narrative of the Negro*
 - Particularly relevant because she utilized images to challenge popularly implemented racial theories in the twentieth century. These pictures are said to not just support the text, but they were also used as examples of the counterpoints she proclaimed in response to the typical, popularized school-taught texts.
- Pendleton "challenging morality" of white Americans can also be seen through her telling of America's role in slavery. In the nineteenth century, many textbook writers blamed slavery on Black people, mostly stating that it was a needed system to "civilize African immigrants."
- Pendleton used her text to attest against these claims, noting how powerful people enslaved those in minority groups in government systems throughout global history.

This is America's Story Evolution

- When American historians started to write about the racist foundation that America was built upon in the early to mid-twentieth century, it was commonly biased and misinformed.
- Howard Baker Wilder's 1948 text *This is America's Story*
- Examining three editions of the textbook:
 - 1954: Start of the Civil Rights Movement
 - 1966: two years after the Civil Rights Act of 1964
 - 1978: years after the major actions of the Civil Rights Movement
- "How Did the Slaves Live?"
- These three examples of text alterations verifies how slavery's interpretation had been significantly modified in just the span of two decades.
- The 1954 edition contains a lot of misconceptions and damaging language that intentionally attempts to minimize the harsh brutalities that Black people confronted on a daily basis in American society.
- The 1966 edition alters some of the prejudiced language and adds more sensitive material, but the main focus of the text is not changed.
- It isn't until the 1978 edition where more significant changes are made to Wilder's book, but even still, there remains biased language that is untouched.
- While the content of the text itself changed for the positive as it became more focused on the struggles that enslaved African Americans faced, it is just as important to consider the illustrations in this text which, overtime, were negatively changed and entirely deleted.

Importance of Illustration

- Illustrations are celebrated by many historians to be used in textbooks as aids and references to American history, and photographs and illustrations are the most personal way to connect historical moments to our own lives, as they are a means for students to engage with the past.
- Louis P. Masur's article "Pictures Have Now Become a Necessity": The Use of Images in American History Textbooks"
 - While pictures are a forgotten primary source, they are what made America desirable to settlers in the Old World.
- Images, whether it be art, photographs or other visual aids, are vital instruments in a truthful telling of a nation's history because they add authenticity and give an identity to those affected by American colonization.
- False argument: the lack of pictures of these despairing times of American history is the reason why these sections lack visual components.
 - Langston Hughes' 1968 text *A Pictorial History of the Negro in America*
- The editions of *This is America's Story* declined over time with the use of imagery in the section addressing slavery.
- Contemporary works have improved on including pictures in this essential section.
- David Kennedy's 2011 textbook *The American Pageant: A History of the Republic*
- Needed visual representation and analysis in the classroom.
 - "The 1619 Project" curriculum as an addition to provided contemporary textbooks.