

HOW LITTLE SOCIALISTS ARE MADE

by Stanley Kurtz, senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, and this article was first published at www.nationalreview.com

The most underappreciated political story of our time is the changing content of K-12 textbooks in history, civics, and social studies. Yes, I said political story. Why are Millennials so receptive to socialism? Why is the Left dominated by identity politics? Why have movements on the political right shifted from a constitutional conservatism symbolized by the Boston Tea Party to a populist nationalism? All these changes are connected to what today's history textbooks are, and *are not*, teaching.

Almost any Advanced Placement U.S. History (APUSH) text has more influence on American politics than most of the books reviewed in our leading newspapers. Yet when was the last time you read a review of a high school history textbook? Never, I'll bet. That's partly because these thousand-page monstrosities are tough to read, and even tougher to judge for anyone but professional historians.

Liberals need not bother keeping track of history textbooks because they are writing them. But conservatives have dropped the ball on this issue so essential to their survival. Conservative politicians, institutions, and donors focus far more on short-term electoral politics and policy than culture. History textbooks don't even register. Over the long haul, that's a recipe for political exile and social ostracism.

Conservatives saw the tip of the enormous textbook iceberg earlier this year when a radio host tweeted out pictures a Minnesota student had taken of an AP U.S. history textbook. The student had photographed pages of the update of James W. Fraser's *By the People*, an APUSH textbook pub-

lished by Pearson, which covered the 2016 election and Black Lives Matter. Their blatantly partisan bias set off a conservative media firestorm.

Fraser's updated text portrayed conservatives as bigots, Trump as mentally unstable, and the Black Lives Matter movement as a reasonable response to a police force acting like an "occupying army" in a "mostly African-American town." It was hit job as history.

Yet the full story of James W. Fraser's *By the People* is even more troubling. Fraser's bias is no mere artifact of a bitterly polarizing election, but runs deeply through his text.

James W. Fraser is a professor of history and education at New York University Steinhardt School of Education and was the founding dean of Northeastern University's School of Education. So Fraser's academic publications make the educational philosophy behind *By the People* frighteningly clear.

American Ed Schools are famously infatuated with Brazilian Marxist Paulo Freire's 1970 book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and Fraser has been a leader in that movement. Fraser and a group of American educators worked closely with Freire in the mid-1990s to publish *Mentoring the Mentor: A Critical Dialogue*. Both men seek a pedagogy capable of inspiring the overthrow of capitalist hegemony.

Like Freire, Fraser draws on the wisdom of Marxist heroes like Che Guevara. Yet as an historian of education, Fraser also invokes his extensive knowledge of textbooks. His most striking claim is that the textbooks used under Eastern European com-

munist were excellent in substance, even if their lessons were hammered too harshly by teachers: "in their critique of capitalism and imperialism, in their sophisticated approach to anti-Semitism, Fascism, and revolutionary struggle — [communist textbooks] represented a very liberating view of the world . . . But sadly the pedagogy was as repressive as the content was liberating."

This claim is stunning. Fraser believes that if only Eastern Europeans had taught communism in a less authoritarian manner, a public freed from the Soviet yoke might not have rejected communism for capitalism. Fraser sees the turn to capitalism by Eastern Europe as an avoidable "tragedy" caused by the unnecessarily harsh teaching methods of communist schools.

The content of Eastern European textbooks was every bit as authoritarian as communist pedagogy. Those textbooks included poems inspiring children to report their friends to the authorities for violations of party dictates. Those textbooks taught that no one is allowed to have "purely personal cares and difficulties in a socialist collective," and denounced Germans who tried to escape over the Berlin Wall. East German textbooks instilled hatred for the "capitalist and imperialist" United States, which was painted in nightmare colors. Is this the content Fraser considers "liberating"?

Fraser argues that "regimes of the right, including those in the United States and other so-called democracies" are authoritarian, in their attempts to force capitalism on students. How curious, then, that Fraser and his Ed School comrades have so far escaped America's Gulag.

Fraser rejects "the pretense" of teacher neutrality as a pernicious cover for the interests of the powerful. The teacher, he says, "must begin with a commitment to social and political liberation." Education, for Fraser, is a

(Continued on page 4)



form of “revolutionary struggle.”

Fraser’s academic writings of the 1990s regularly invoke leading socialist thinkers of the day, while attacking capitalism and private property. He condemns conservative intellectuals and rejects the “sheer mean-spiritedness of much of what passes for religion in this country.”

Perhaps Fraser’s greatest wrath is reserved for what he calls “angry white maleness.” He saw the 1994 Republican takeover of the House as an expression of “angry white maleness,” which he called “a recipe for fascism.” He dismissed even liberal Arthur Schlesinger’s well-received critique of multiculturalism, *The Disuniting of America*, as but a symptom of “angry white maleness.”

Fraser has a soft spot for radicals of every sort. In his 2004 book, *History of Hope*, he lauds the 19th century utopian movements that dispensed with monogamy and private property. He celebrates ethnic Mexicans in the American Southwest who refused to accept the results of the Mexican-American war even generations later, praising their violent resistance to “Anglo-American aggression.”

He commends the various liberation movements of the 1960s and lauds Jesse Jackson’s “Rainbow Coalition” speech at the 1988 Democratic National Convention as a high point of American history. In *By the People*, though, excerpts from Jackson’s address are juxtaposed to passages from Pat Robertson’s speech at the 1988 Republican Convention.

By the People presents every leftist movement of the time in glowing, uncritical terms. Conservatives, on the other hand, are consistently portrayed as angry, unthinking reactionaries and vicious racists.

Fraser quotes lengthy inspiring excerpts from President Obama’s second inaugural address. When leftists go to extremes, Fraser always offers justifications: American napalm in Vietnam explains violent anti-war demonstrations; Black Panther radi-

calism is merely a response to police forces acting like “occupying armies” in the black community. Fraser goes into high dudgeon over Rush Limbaugh’s humorous jabs at the left, bemoaning the decline of “good manners.” Yet he presents the vastly cruder antics of the Yippies as necessary mockery of those who were “leading the country to ruin.”

Conservative opposition to Clintoncare and Obamacare is said to be fueled by selfish insurance interests, not policy arguments. Instead of presenting the argument for limited government, we’re told that conservatives opposed Obamacare because of a “longstanding bias among Americans against big government.” Fraser’s academic work reduces conservatism to a series of irritable mental gestures.

Fraser portrays conservatives as heartless racists and sexists. He mischaracterizes the GOP’s “southern strategy,” and explains opposition to Hillary Clinton as the product of sexism. Concerns about crime are dismissed as code for racial bigotry. Controversies over single motherhood and conservative stances on social issues are treated as simple heartlessness or antiquated religiosity, rather than concern over family decline. On abortion, opponents are not in favor of the right to life but said to be “opposed to abortion rights.” For Fraser, there’s no such thing as illegal immigrants, only those who came to the U.S. “without official approval.”

It is hard to see how a student using Fraser’s textbook could even respect conservatives, much less become one.

In the 2014-15 battle over the College Board’s revised APUSH curriculum, I argued that the new framework was biased for portraying liberals responding to genuine problems but conservatives reacting from fear. Fraser’s political biases match perfectly with the College Board’s.

How could a man who appears to be a committed socialist, who dismisses America as a fake democracy,

and who despises conservatives, have been chosen to write an American history textbook meant to be used by students of every political view? It’s clear from the left-multiculturalist bias of the College Board’s APUSH framework that Fraser was a logical choice to write an accompanying textbook. The College Board’s new curriculum was bound to produce this sort of text.

By the People also shows us that the College Board’s controversial decision to cover “history” right up to the present is a recipe for political abuse. Students should not be forced to digest Fraser’s (or anyone else’s) viciously partisan take on the politics of the day as “history.”

Critics also warned that the College Board’s decision to issue detailed curricula for its AP courses was a strategy for circumventing state and local authorities to create a de facto leftist national curriculum. Fraser teaches a course at NYU that uses *By the People* and the College Board’s APUSH framework to train future AP teachers plus social studies and non-AP teachers. His syllabus for that course argues that we should treat the College Board’s new APUSH framework as de facto national standards for all U.S. history courses.

Still more sadly, James W. Fraser’s story is America’s story. I know no more powerful example of the radical left’s long march through the institutions. A Marx-loving disciple of Paulo Freire is now churning out textbooks, teachers, and students who neither understand nor respect America’s founding ideas, nor those who continue to defend them. 

EAGLE FORUM

President: *Eunie Smith*

Report Editor: *Cathie Adams*

Yearly membership \$25.00

Extra copies available:

1/\$1, 50/\$10, 100/\$20