

SPEECH

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TOPIC: PREJUDICE ABOUT INDIANS IN TEXTBOOKS

Textbooks have for many years been the target of relentless criticism. They are criticized for their tendency to present slanted "facts", stereotypes and ethnocentric attitudes under the guise of "proven knowledge"; they are criticized for reflecting a white, middle-class society and for denigrating the contributions of minority racial groups. These books, consciously or unconsciously, are believed to promote, reinforce and perpetuate racial and ethnic bias.

The publishing industry's earliest response^{to} criticism was to colour white faces brown or black or to "write in" Blacks, Indian or other ethnic minorities. Some Government Departments of Education respond merely, by asking teachers to "cut-out" pages that have been identified as most objectionable.

Clearly these efforts are insufficient. What is needed is drastic change in structure, in substantive content and in methodology. Books must realistically depict the pluralistic quality of society, both past and present. Until this happens, textbooks will continue to be the target of well-founded criticism.

Fifteen years ago in 1961, the 7th Annual Indian and Metis Conference held in Winnipeg, Manitoba (Canada) the following resolution was passed:

WHEREAS it has been brought to the attention of this Conference that authorized textbooks used in elementary schools, particularly the Social Studies courses, tend to promote a patronizing and degrading attitude on the part of white people toward Indians, and

WHEREAS the use of such texts in Indian schools may be harmful to the Indian child's sense of racial dignity, and

WHEREAS some sections of the texts deal inaccurately with Indian life,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this 7th Indian and Metis Conference seek to have such school text books discontinued as are patronizing and degrading to Indians and to have new text books or revisions dealing with Indian life written with accuracy and sympathetic treatment.

To substantiate the contention of the resolution, the Education Committee of the Conference undertook to review a number of social studies textbooks. The review revealed that all history textbooks were basically the same.

... "There are startling errors of omission as well as commission; the ancient Indian religious beliefs are always contemptuously dismissed; the authors find it necessary to repeatedly point out the lack of cleanliness of the wigwams and the food while more important virtues go ignored; and once we reach the period of Confederation there creeps in that smug-paternalism that so undermines Indian pride and imposes on him either lethargy or a destructive resentment. A verse from page 37 of Pages from Canada's Story illustrates the point.

"Who calls?
The Red Man, Poor and Sick
He calls.
Who comes?
The White Man, Rich and Strong
He comes.
Who watches?
To see that Pity Reigns,
God watches." (1)

Though the review substantiated the contention of the resolution, many of these books remained on the course of studies for years afterward.

Is there a need to concern ourselves about prejudice in textbooks. Rupert Costo, editor of Textbooks and the American Indian made the following statement.

"Everyone has the right to his opinion. A person has also the right to be wrong. But a textbook has no right to be wrong, or to lie, evade the truth, falsify history or insult or malign a whole race of people."

It is the contention of Indian people that textbooks which patronize and degrade Indians are harmful to their children's sense of racial dignity. It is necessary for us to affect change, to counteract each and everything that is a deterrent to our educational progress. We must ensure that honour is attached to our culture, our values, our customs and our contributions. If Indians continue to be portrayed as savages, thieves, murderers and drunks, our educational progress will forever be in jeopardy.

I don't know if textbook analyses documenting bias toward Indians is the answer. For some provinces, it has had its impact and certain school textbooks have been discontinued. Some have even established committees with Indian representation to screen books before they become authorized for use in their schools. Unfortunately, this direction at present is an exception rather than the rule.

During the last decade, several textbook analyses have been done. Teaching Prejudice by McDiarmid and Pratt selected 6 categories for a study of assertions. The six categories were Christians, Jews, Moslems, Negroes (Blacks), Indians and Immigrants. Christians were chosen as the control group. They found that Christians and Jews were highly favoured and Negroes (Blacks) and Indians were much less so. Terms most frequently applied to each group were, devoted Christians, great Jews, hardworking Immigrants, infidel Moselms, primitive Negroes, and savage Indians. In their study of pictorial stereotypes, they selected Africans, Asians, and North American Indians. The control group was white Canadians. In this study, Indians emerged as the least favoured of all the groups. They were portrayed as primitive, unskilled, aggressive and hostile.

The authors of this study, McDiarmid and Pratt state that:

"The non-white minority most frequently mentioned in Ontario social studies textbooks is the North American Indian. It is bad enough that any group should be subjected to prejudicial treatment, but the fact that Indians are the Native people of this country and that their children are required to read these texts compounds the immorality of such treatment." (2)

Earlier I mentioned a textbook study initiated in the province of Manitoba in 1961. In 1973-74, I was involved in another textbook evaluation sponsored by the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood. This study entitled The Shocking Truth About Indians in Text Books, was more extensive than the 1961 study. It was a review of grades 4 to 6 social studies textual materials. It was done with the same objective in mind as the one in 1961. That is, if we can document the biased and inadequate treatment of Indians, we can pressure the Department of Education to discontinue certain textbooks, and we can make publishers more responsive to demands for improved textual materials. Content of social studies textual materials was evaluated according to ten criteria. These were:

1. Bias by Omission: selecting information that reflects credit on only one group, frequently the writer's group.
2. Bias by Defamation: calling attention to the native person's faults rather than his virtues and misrepresenting his nature.
3. Bias by Disparagement (disparagement: something that lowers a thing or person in worth or importance): denying or belittling the contributions of native people to Canadian culture.
4. Bias by Cumulative Implication: constantly creating the impression that only one group is responsible for positive developments.
5. Bias by (lack of) Validity: failing to ensure that information about issues is always accurate and unambiguous. (Ambiguous: having more than one possible meaning.)
6. Bias by Inertia: perpetuation of legends and half-truths by failure to keep abreast of historical scholarship.
7. Bias by Obliteration: ignoring significant aspects of native history.
8. Bias by Disembodiment: referring in a casual and depersonalized way to the "Indian menace" or representing the annihilation of Indian culture as part of the "march for progress."

9. Bias by (lack of) Concreteness: dealing with a race or group in platitudes and generalizations (applying the shortcomings of one individual to a whole group). To be concrete, the material must be factual, objective and realistic.

10. Bias by (lack of) Comprehensiveness: failing to mention all relevant facts that may help to form the opinion of the student.

Examples:

1) Canada a New Land, By Edith Deyell

Bias by Disembodiment:

Page 40

A few natives went home with him. They were souvenirs of his trip, as were the bright coloured birds, the tobacco plants, and the potatoes.

Note:

The use of the word "souvenirs" in speaking of Indian people is in very poor taste. The natives were not all wanting to go with Columbus. The following quotation clarifies this point: "Christopher Columbus initiated the enslavement of Native Americans by Europeans in 1494 by sending more than 500 of them to Spain to be sold..."

2) Canada a New Land, by Edith Deyell

Bias by Disparagement

Page 66

Perhaps the sailors made friends with the Indians as you would make friends with a puppy - by offering something to eat.

Note:

This type of example equating an Indian with a puppy is derogatory and denigrates the dignity of the Indian person.

3) Canada a New Land,

Bias by Omission:

Page 203-204

The Indians came pounding after them, waving their tomahawks and knives, and yelling blue murder.

Note:

Here would be an excellent opportunity to comment upon the fighting strategy of the various Indian tribes. The European

style (the bright red coats, the marching lines, the bugles and drums) brought failure to General Braddock. Repulsed as he may have been by Indian warfare, it was effective. So effective were the surprise and ambush tactics that Braddock's forces were dispersed and the General killed. From this lesson, the British learned to adopt the Indian style of fighting.

4) Canada: The New Nation by Edith Deyell

Bias by Defamation:

Page 163

Heavily armed whiskey smugglers from the United States are crossing the border, and trading a terrible kind of whiskey to Indians for buffalo skins, for ponies, and even for squaws. Half-crazed with this alcohol, which they gulp down at the trader's wagons, the drunken Indians have no regard for life or property. They go wild and murder each other in brawls.

Note:

It would seem that the author regards skins and ponies as more important than "squaws". There is rarely, if ever, a balanced attitude towards the Indian people on the author's part. Their shortcomings are always pointed out in a degrading way, while the white man's faults are hardly mentioned.

5) Fur Trade - (Jackdaw)

Bias by Disparagement:

Exhibit 1

Years of bitter competition and training with savages numbed their finer sensibilities, so did sleeping with the only women in thousands of miles and "begetting bits of brown."

Note:

"Begetting bits of brown" is part of a quote made by Sir George Simpson. Employment of it on the author's part is dehumanizing. A change in lifestyle, philosophy and new relationships should not be referred to as a "numbing" process and sleeping with Indian women does not "cure finer instincts". Indian women were noted by European men for their beauty.

6) Indians of Canada (Coles. Canadiana Collection:)

Bias by Disparagement:

Exhibit 3

The Bourgeois willingly paid premium prices for top quality pemmican. They also scaled down the prices paid for poor stuff; unhappily described by one of them:

"Take scrapings from the dirtiest outside of a very stale piece of cold roast, beef, add to it lumps of tallow, rancid fat...then garnish all with human hair...and short hairs from dogs and oxen, and you have pemmican."

Note:

The real recipe for pemmican precedes this description. However, the imbalance is effective enough for a child to remember the "bad" pemmican. By this manner, pemmican is downgraded and the importance that it held as a main food is not understood.

Also reviewed was the evaluation coefficient analysis of words found in the grade six social studies textual materials. The table attached as Appendix "A" lists the most frequently used positive and negative words.

In 1974, "The Shocking Truth About Indians in Text Books" was presented to the Provincial Government. To my knowledge, once again, no official response has been made to the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood or no action has been taken by the provincial government to implement the recommendations of the report.

It appears that to get action in regard to prejudice in textbooks, it will be necessary to act collectively on a national or even international basis. There is enough data documented both in Canada and the United States to demand action on the part of government Departments of Education and the publishing industry.

A comparison of various studies indicate that:

- 1) text book researchers have tended to arrive at surprisingly uniform conclusions on certain general areas
- 2) Indians, by far, receive the worst treatment in textbooks of any class of minority, either by omission or commission
- 3) recent textbooks still contain prejudice but in a more subtle manner
- 4) Authors tend to use the same secondary sources for reference, therefore, they tend to say the same things.

Though most of this discussion has centered around prejudice found in social studies textual materials it should not be construed to mean that prejudice does not occur in textbooks of other subject areas.

In conclusion, I wish to, again, refer you to the 1961 resolution passed by the Indian and Metis Conference in Winnipeg, Manitoba (Canada). The resolution is still valid and should be reiterated by this 21st Annual Convention of the International Reading Association.

WHEREAS it has been brought to the attention of this Conference that authorized textbooks used in elementary schools, particularly the Social Studies courses, tend to promote a patronizing and degrading attitude on the part of white people toward Indians, and

WHEREAS the use of such texts in Indian schools may be harmful to the Indian child's sense of racial dignity, and

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THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED this 21st Annual Convention of the International Reading Association seek to

APPENDIX "A"

POSITIVE +

	EUROPEAN				INDIAN		
1	great	123	(15)	friendly	40	(40)	
2	good	79	(5)	great	15	(123)	
3	successful	70	(5)	happy	15	(38)	
4	brave	67	(5)	skillful	15	(44)	
5	gentlemen	66	(0)	clever	12	(21)	
6	strong	64	(10)	remarkable	10	(3)	
7	honourable	52	(3)	strong	10	(64)	
8	courageous	47	(0)	able	6	(6)	
9	determine	46	(5)	admirable	6	(9)	
10	skillful	44	(15)	eager	6	(41)	

NEGATIVE -

	EUROPEAN				INDIAN		
1	bitter	50	(7)	savage	62	(8)	
2	angry	43	(8)	hostile	30	(4)	
3	quarrelsome	36	(4)	squaw	20	(0)	
4	disgruntled	26	(3)	raiding	18	(24)	
5	threatening	25	(9)				
6	raiding	24	(18)	massacre	13	(4)	
7	failure	22	(3)	drunk	11	(10)	
8	fearful	20	(3)	howling	11	(3)	
9	mob	17	(1)	unfriendly	11	(4)	
10	terrible	16	(4)	warlife	10	(6)	

** NUMBERS IN PARENTHESES
SIGNIFIES INDIAN

** NUMBERS IN PARENTHESES
SIGNIFIES EUROPEAN

FOOTNOTES

- (1) Education Committee of Indian and Metis Conference, Submission to the Curriculum Revision Committee, Manitoba Department of Education, Community Welfare Planning Council, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1964.
- (2) McDiarmid and Pratt, Teaching Prejudice, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1971.

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