



Censorship and

LEGISLATION recently passed by the Tennessee Senate would prevent textbooks from presenting as scientific fact the various theories concerning man's origin. This legislation would stipulate that the Book of Genesis' explanation, as well as Darwin's and other theories of man's origin, be presented as theories rather than as scientific fact. The action is similar in nature to a recent California ruling whereby textbooks are being modified by the insertion of conditional statements concerning evolution.¹

While these events and others that will doubtless follow in their wake may seem harmless enough to many, perhaps evoking only amusing memories of the Scopes trial and little else, there are implications of a serious nature that perhaps should be considered. Since these changes have been brought about generally by forces external to the scientific and academic communities at a time when the specter of censorship in the form of intimidation of newsmen, news sources, and network television is on the rise, perhaps we should give pause to consider the ever-present problem of censorship and the school curriculum.

There have been numerous and powerful advocates of censorship in every age.

¹ Laurel N. Tanner and Daniel Tanner. "Charles Darwin Needs Clarence Darrow." *Educational Leadership* 30 (6): 579; March 1973.

While the advocates operate in different ways, there are recurring patterns that tend to emerge. In this regard, Sloan has suggested that:

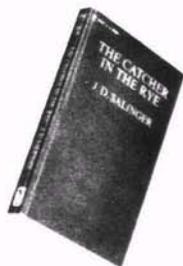
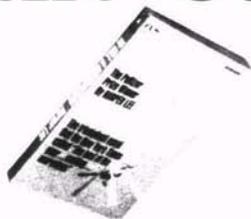
Today's censors still exhibit one or more of the four traditional characteristics of the censor: they espouse *secrecy*, attempt to *edit* that with which they disagree, and/or make themselves judges for what is morally or politically acceptable for society.²

Textbook Selection

Perhaps in no other area have all of these characteristics been expressed more than in the area of textbook selection in the social studies. The persistent efforts of a handful of persons can often result in the banning of a particular text or in its alteration or modification. In this regard, Nelson and Roberts have provided a detailed and interesting case study illustrating how the character of a textbook can be transformed through alteration. The brief example to follow, drawn from their study of a Texas State Textbook Committee hearing, represents the kind of subtle alteration that along with several other changes resulted in the substantial modification of a geography text adopted by that state.

² George W. Sloan. "Censorship in Historical Perspective." *Top of the News* 22: 271; April 1966.

the Curriculum



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Original Version: "Because it needs to trade, and because it needs military help, the United States needs the friendship of countries throughout the world. But to keep its friends, a country must help them, too."

Changed to: "The United States trades with countries in all parts of the world. We are also providing military help to many nations. In addition, the United States aids many countries in other ways."³

While instances of censorship can be treated as isolated cases, the pressure of textbook censorship is not a welcome event when one considers the time and money spent on emphasizing the inquiry approach to social studies during the past decade. Unfortunately, the adoption of sterile, safe textbooks may create a climate of self-imposed censorship that can run counter to the values of the inquiry method as well as inhibit in various other ways the teaching of social studies by the process approach.

While English teachers have traditionally borne the brunt of book-banning attempts, there seems to be little "rhyme or reason" to this type of censorship. Apparently nearly every book of consequence, including such classics as *Gone with the Wind*, *Huckleberry Finn*, 1984, *To Kill a Mockingbird*,

³ J. Nelson and G. Roberts. *The Censors and the Schools*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1963. p. 130.

and *The Grapes of Wrath*, has fallen victim to the censor at one time or another. The conclusion that few books have indeed escaped the would-be censors' wrath seems to be highlighted by the fact that:

In the files of the National Council of Teachers of English are reports of efforts to ban *Robin Hood*, because he advocates sharing the wealth and is therefore Communistic; *The Scarlet Letter*, because it deals with adultery; *The King and I*, because it mentions a concubine; a short account of the life of Plato, because he advocated something like free love; the *Odyssey*, because this book from the ninth century B.C. is "non-Christian."⁴

While this kind of censorship has often affected the school library in a general way, it can also be felt in quite specific ways, as in the case of the recent banning of the best-seller *Body Language* by a New York school board. Concerned with nonverbal communication and used in an elective "communications" course, the book was banned by a review committee following the complaint of a local citizen. In addition to the banning of *Body Language*, the school principal was

⁴ H. Norris. "Should We Censor What Adolescents Read?" *The PTA Magazine* 50: 11; March 1965.

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apparently "instructed by the committee to draft a policy assigning textbook selection and curriculum solely to board members."⁵

Influence on Science

While the effect of censorship in the area of humanities should be evident, its effect on the science curriculum has perhaps been less noteworthy. However, with the advent of the kind of action mentioned at the beginning of this article concerning the treatment of evolution in science textbooks, several factors should be kept in mind. The first and perhaps most important would question the effect that this kind of censorship might have upon the science curriculum in general and student learning in particular.

Few educators need to be reminded of the fact that since 1956 the National Science Foundation has contributed vast sums to support major curriculum projects primarily in science and mathematics. This is, of course, in addition to the large amounts contributed by private organizations and the U.S. Office of Education toward the goal of improving course content in the sciences. The outgrowth of this work and expenditure has resulted in the development of the PSSC physics, the CHEM Study chemistry, and the BSCS biology materials, in addition to various other projects with similar aims, objectives, and methods. As a by-product, many of the objectives, methods, and unifying ideas from these courses have been incorporated into several of the so-called traditional textbook approaches in science.

It should be kept in mind that each of the curriculum projects mentioned has been centered around certain unifying or organizing themes. For instance, one of the principal organizing themes for the BSCS biology materials is the concept of evolution. As

such, evolution plays a central role in organizing, unifying, and clarifying the content of modern biology.⁶ At this point, the question must come into play as to whether or not it is sound learning practice to begin isolating the organizing element of modern biology, namely evolution, in order to present it as a discrete isolated theory, and in order to place it in competition, so to speak, with other discrete isolated theories.

While this approach may be applauded by some, the fact that it might represent a serious step backward toward the discreteness of the subject-centered curriculum should at least be given consideration. An interesting action in this regard can be seen in a recent decision by the Texas State Board of Education to remove two BSCS biology textbooks from the state-approved list, in addition to the requiring of all textbooks treating evolution to insert a preface to the effect that "evolution is presented not as a fact, but as a theory."⁷

Finally, it should be remembered that whether a censorship action is local in nature, as in a recent Connecticut case where an entire chapter was removed from the local high school physiology text,⁸ or whether an action is statewide in nature, students in other parts of the country may well be affected. It appears to be the case that the textbook industry is too often vulnerable both directly and indirectly to censorship efforts. With this in mind, educators should more than ever work to oppose censorship, or at the very least work to assure that any textbooks or curriculum changes are, as much as possible, in accord with sound learning theory and teaching method. □

⁶J. Marshall and Ernest Burkman, *Current Trends in Science Education*. New York: Center for Applied Research in Education, 1966. p. 39.

⁷Tanner, *op. cit.*

⁸"Physiology Text Mutilated; Depicts Sexual Reproduction." *Library Journal* 98: 1331; April 15, 1973.

⁵"N. Y. School Board Bans Body Language." *Library Journal* 98: 1332; April 15, 1973.

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