

# Evaluate Your Textbooks for Racism, Sexism!

MAX ROSENBERG\*

*The statement "Criteria for Evaluating the Treatment of Minority Groups and Women in Textbooks and Other Learning Materials" is a revision and refinement of a paper published two years ago by the Michigan ASCD. Its major new element is a clear recognition that women as well as racial-ethnic minorities must now receive what they have both been so long denied—equal educational opportunities, as reflected in fair treatment in curriculum and instructional materials, as also in other dimensions of school and community life.*

*The statement of criteria was written by Max Rosenberg of the Detroit Public Schools, who served several years as chairman of the Equal Educational Opportunities Task Force of MASCD. Dr. Rosenberg has recently been appointed by the ASCD Executive Council to head a special ASCD Working Group on Bias in Instructional Materials.*

*The original statement of criteria received very wide attention from school systems and colleges across the country. Thousands of copies were requested and purchased, and numerous reprints were authorized. The statement was reprinted in Audiovisual Instruction. Articles and reports about it were printed in the Spotlight of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, in NEA NOW, and in Educational Leadership.*

*Large numbers of textbooks in current use in American public schools do not meet the essential needs of our children and youth. As educators, we—you and I—must change this intolerable situation. We must play an active role to assure that the textbooks used in our schools do meet the needs of students in a pluralistic, democratic society.*

*The statement of criteria, with its pointed guidelines, can serve as a useful tool in the process of evaluating textbooks and other learning materials. It has proved to be very helpful to many teachers, supervisors, administrators, and to board of education members and other interested citizens.*

*You, too, can make good and effective use of the criteria. Evaluate the books that you use now in your classrooms, in your school, in your school district; reject and demand replacement for those which do not meet the test! Before you approve and purchase any new learning materials, carefully examine and evaluate them to make sure that they do meet high standards both in subject area content and in their fair and accurate and balanced treatment of women and minority groups.*

\* Max Rosenberg, Editor, *Quest*, Detroit, Michigan, *Public Schools Staff Journal*

## Criteria for Evaluating the Treatment of Minority Groups and Women in Textbooks and Other Learning Materials

Educators have a major responsibility for the kind and quality of textbooks and other curriculum materials used in the learning-teaching process.

As responsible and dedicated educators in a democracy, we must bring our influence and strength and commitment and wisdom to bear. We must insist upon the production, selection, and use of the finest learning materials that our writers and artists are capable of creating for the education of all our children—male and female, black and white, rich and poor, rural and urban and suburban, Catholic and Protestant and Jewish, Indian and Oriental and Spanish-speaking—all of our children without exception.

Textbooks and other instructional materials are vitally important to learners and their learning. These materials are relevant to the students' life experiences, or they are not. These materials give the students the clear feeling that this education is intended for them, or it is not. These materials make the students aware that they are part of the mainstream of American education and

American life, or that they are not. Curriculum materials profoundly affect learners and their learning—in the way they view themselves and their social groups; in the way they think about their roles and future, and about the society and its future; in the way they are motivated to work and play and learn and live.

All textbooks and other curriculum materials should be examined, analyzed, and evaluated with care and thought, to ensure that they meet the highest standards both in subject area content and in their treatment of women and minority groups. Books and other materials which do not meet these highest standards should certainly be rejected.

Following is a list of 20 criteria which can serve as significant guidelines for educators in the process of selecting textbooks and other curriculum materials. While not all of the criteria will be applicable in every case, the questions raised do focus upon basic considerations in the learning materials that we use in the education or miseducation of our children.

Does this textbook or learning material in both its textual content and illustrations:

- |  | Yes                      | No                       |  | Yes                      | No                       |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Evidence on the part of writers, artists, and editors a sensitivity to prejudice, to stereotypes, to the use of material which would be offensive to women or to any minority group?  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. Provide abundant recognition for women and minority groups by placing them frequently in positions of leadership and centrality?  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Suggest, by omission or commission, or by overemphasis or underemphasis, that any sexual, racial, religious, or ethnic segment of our population is more or less worthy, more or less capable, more or less important in the mainstream of American life? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5. Depict both male and female adult members of minority groups in situations which exhibit them as fine and worthy models to emulate?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Utilize numerous opportunities for full, fair, accurate, and balanced treatment of women and minority groups?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. Present many instances of fully integrated human groupings and settings to indicate equal status and nonsegregated social relationships?  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 7. Make clearly apparent the group representation of individuals—Caucasian, Afro-American, Indian, Chinese, Mexican American, etc.—and not seek to avoid identification by such means as smudging some color over Caucasian facial features? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

	Yes	No		Yes	No
8. Give comprehensive, broadly ranging, and well-planned representation to women and minority groups—in art and science, in history and mathematics and literature, and in all other areas of life and culture?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			
9. Delineate life in contemporary urban environments as well as in rural or suburban environments, so that today's city children can also find significant identification for themselves, their problems and challenges, and their potential for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			
10. Portray sexual, racial, religious, and ethnic groups in our society in such a way as to build positive images—mutual understanding and respect, full and unqualified acceptance, and commitment to ensure equal opportunity for all?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			
11. Present social group differences in ways that will cause students to look upon the multi-cultural character of our nation as a value which we must esteem and treasure?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			
12. Assist students to recognize clearly the basic similarities among all members of the human race, and the uniqueness of every single individual?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			
13. Teach the great lesson that we must accept each other on the basis of individual worth, regardless of sex or race or religion or socioeconomic background?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			
14. Help students appreciate the many important contributions to our civilization made by members of the various human groups, emphasizing that every human group has its list of achievers, thinkers, writers, artists, scientists, builders, and political leaders?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			
			15. Supply an accurate and sound balance in the matter of historical perspective, making it perfectly clear that all racial and religious and ethnic groups have mixed heritages, which can well serve as sources of both group pride and group humility?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			16. Clarify the true historical forces and conditions which in the past have operated to the disadvantage of women and minority groups?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			17. Clarify the true contemporary forces and conditions which at present operate to the disadvantage of women and minority groups?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			18. Analyze intergroup tension and conflict fairly, frankly, objectively, and with emphasis upon resolving our social problems in a spirit of fully implementing democratic values and goals in order to achieve the American dream for all Americans?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			19. Seek to motivate students to examine their own attitudes and behaviors, and to comprehend their own duties and responsibilities as citizens in a pluralistic democracy—to demand freedom and justice and equal opportunity for every individual and for every group?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
			20. Help minority group (as well as majority group) students to identify more fully with the educational process by providing textual content and illustrations which give students many opportunities for building a more positive self-image, pride in their group, knowledge consistent with their experience; in sum, learning material which offers students meaningful and relevant learning worthy of their best efforts and energies?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

This author's criteria are not in effect a rating scale. You may however want to judge your present learning materials by these criteria. Unless you are able to answer "Yes" to all of these questions, you may feel there is room for improvement—or even a need to select new textbooks and other instructional materials.

Copyright © 1973 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.