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Van Gosse

*The Journal of American History*, Vol. 82, No. 2. (Sep., 1995), pp. 658-669.

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*The Journal of American History* is currently published by Organization of American Historians.

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# Consensus and Contradiction in Textbook Treatments of the Sixties

Van Gosse

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Working as a free-lance development editor on (nonhistory) textbooks over the past five years, I've learned something of how college texts are written, edited, and marketed. (A development editor plays no role in commissioning or shaping the general direction of a text but acts as an internal coordinator of the reviewing and rewriting process.) Most obviously, they are produced in a completely different fashion than scholarly monographs. Authorship does remain an important factor, however, both because the reputation of major scholars helps sell textbooks and because college-division editors have no illusions that these books can be written by computers. But all textbooks are consciously assembled, vetted, and packaged to a considerable extent by people other than the titular authors—no surprise to the hundreds of professors in every discipline who are routinely invited to review manuscripts for a modest fee.

It is this reviewing process, largely an unscientific form of market testing, that indicates the central impulse of textbook publishing: the valid comparison for any text is the immediate competition. There is nothing submerged about these concerns. The most important question in the standard questionnaires sent to reviewers is the final one, "Will you consider adoption of \_\_\_\_\_ over your present text?" To secure a sufficient number of "Yes" responses to this question, the editors who commission textbooks seek to balance originality and familiarity. Does a given manuscript cover the same material as its rivals, as well as they do or even better? Does it establish itself as innovative through a new approach that the market may or may not warrant—in other words, is it a "mainstream" or a "niche" book, or can it be both? Most important, does it suit a typical teacher at one standard level of college teaching (elite liberal arts college or major public university, small state campus or religious school, or community college)?

I refer to the conditions under which textbooks are written because they help explain the most obvious fact about them: they tend to be remarkably similar in what is and what is not included; how an incident, person, or occasion is described; and in the sequence used to establish relationships among events. In the case of what we call "the sixties," a category with a personal resonance for most authors, as well as for current political discourse, this conventionality takes on a distinctive

Van Gosse is the Editorial Chair of the *Radical History Review*.

cast. Since the events of that time are so fresh, so painful, and still so fought over, the eleven textbooks reviewed here clearly reveal where there is (1) a strong consensus, (2) a new and emerging consensus, or (3) no consensus at all. In the last case, where historians have not yet agreed to agree, some important incidents, even the larger contours of our history, are simply ignored or at best surface as the quirk of an individual author.

The character of a "strong consensus" is by its very nature familiar; it is what we all recognize as the recent past. Here similar themes and treatments, often the same anecdotes and tableaux, run through nearly every account. Not only does every text celebrate the August 1963 March on Washington climaxed by Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, but in five of these books, students read of the dignified older Black woman who declared, at the height of the 1955–1956 Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott, that "my feet is tired, but my soul is rested."<sup>1</sup> Nine out of eleven set up the beginnings of the counterculture in the fifties with a short section on the Beats, almost always pairing Jack Kerouac and *On the Road* with Allen Ginsberg and *Howl* as paradigms of fifties alienation.<sup>2</sup> Every text except one cites Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, her formation of the National Organization for Women in 1966, plus, in most cases, President John F. Kennedy's 1961 appointment of a Presidential Commission on the Status of Women as key events in the revival of feminism.<sup>3</sup> All but two mention Michael Harrington's *The Other America* of 1962 as the nation's wake-up call to the continued existence of poor people, which either implicitly or explicitly stimulated the War on Poverty of the Lyndon B. Johnson years.<sup>4</sup> And most texts use the

<sup>1</sup> Gary B. Nash et al., *The American People: Creating a Nation and a Society*, vol. II: *Since 1865*, 3d ed. (New York, 1994), 1010; Mary Beth Norton et al., *A People and a Nation: A History of the United States*, vol. II: *Since 1865*, 3d ed. (Boston, 1990), 939; Stephan Thernstrom, *A History of the American People*, vol. II: *Since 1865*, 2d ed. (San Diego, 1989), 841; James A. Henretta et al., *America's History*, 2d ed. (New York, 1993), 952; Robert A. Divine et al., *America: Past and Present*, 3d ed. (New York, 1991), 880; Bernard Bailyn et al., *The Great Republic: A History of the American People*, vol. II, 4th ed. (Lexington, Mass., 1992), 500; John Mack Faragher et al., *Out of Many: A History of the American People* (Englewood Cliffs, 1994), 909; Alan Brinkley et al., *American History: A Survey*, 8th ed. (New York, 1991), 896; Paul S. Boyer et al., *The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People*, 2d ed. (Lexington, Mass., 1993), 1003b; Winthrop D. Jordan and Leon F. Litwack, *The United States*, 7th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, 1991), 784; Joshua Freeman et al., *Who Built America? Working People and the Nation's Economy, Politics, Culture, and Society*, vol. II: *From the Gilded Age to the Present* (New York, 1992), 551. For the quotation, see Thernstrom, *History of the American People*, 806; Henretta et al., *America's History*, 948; Faragher et al., *Out of Many*, 893; Boyer et al., *Enduring Vision*, 988; and Norton et al., *People and a Nation*, II, 863.

<sup>2</sup> Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York, 1957); Allen Ginsberg, *Howl* (San Francisco, 1956). For the pairing of Kerouac and Ginsberg, see Nash et al., *American People*, II, 948; Norton et al., *People and a Nation*, II, 902; Henretta et al., *America's History*, 965–66; Faragher et al., *Out of Many*, 875; Brinkley et al., *American History*, 866; Boyer et al., *Enduring Vision*, 993; and Freeman et al., *Who Built America?*, II, 531. For the pairing of Kerouac with Lawrence Ferlinghetti, see Divine et al., *America*, 865. For Kerouac alone, see Bailyn et al., *Great Republic*, II, 487.

<sup>3</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York, 1963); Nash et al., *American People*, II, 1024, 1020; Norton et al., *People and a Nation*, II, 955; Henretta et al., *America's History*, 909–11, 968; Divine et al., *America*, 925; Bailyn et al., *Great Republic*, II, 554; Faragher et al., *Out of Many*, 943, 865, 883; Brinkley et al., *American History*, 930; Boyer et al., *Enduring Vision*, 1019–20, 1067; Jordan and Litwack, *United States*, 851, 855–56; Freeman et al., *Who Built America?*, II, 592.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (New York, 1962); Nash et al., *American People*, II, 954; Norton et al., *People and a Nation*, II, 880, 960; Henretta et al., *America's History*, 913, 928; Divine et al., *America*, 884; Bailyn et al., *Great Republic*, II, 483; Faragher et al., *Out of Many*, 917–

My Lai massacre and the shootings of students at Kent State and Jackson State universities in May 1970, amid a nationwide student strike, to indicate the damage done to the United States by the Vietnam War.<sup>5</sup>

One particular area of consensus, however, underlines the serious implications of too facile a concordance among historians. Without exception these eleven texts position 1968 as a crucial fault line in American history, not only as a year of unexampled violence (the Tet Offensive, the assassinations of King and Robert F. Kennedy, the Chicago Democratic National Convention), but as the key moment of transition from the liberal-Democratic sixties, which come a cropper on Vietnam, to the reactionary-Republican sixties of Richard M. Nixon. This unstated assumption of a declension from "good" to "bad" sixties, however differently those values are assigned, is hardly surprising since so much of the current historiography reflects that view. In fact, agreeing on some form of a declension and choosing to disagree, however politely, on its causes is the essence of the current consensus.

From my perspective, this agreement is itself problematic, since it covers over profound differences, as well as the fact that one person's declension may be another's ascension to power or at least recognition. The emphasis on 1968, while both empirically evident and useful pedagogically, reflects these problems. If that year is both the high tide of dissent and the moment when a conservative backlash surges to the fore, then how can the sustained pressure of the antiwar movement in 1969 through 1972 be explained, including its relationship to intra-Democratic party insurgency and the candidacy of George McGovern? One example of the consequences of making 1968 serve as an all-purpose plot device is that only five of these books discuss the Vietnam Moratorium of October and November 1969.<sup>6</sup>

In most of these cases, one can hardly quarrel with the choice of signal events, though sometimes it leads to a suspicion that textbook authors in desperation seek only to impart a minimal level of "historical literacy" to a generation stunned by too many recycled images.

The coverage of the Stonewall riot and more generally of gay and lesbian Americans (who are, with few exceptions, completely absent from the text until Stonewall) illustrates a new consensus emerging although not yet fully established. Six texts position Stonewall as "the beginning of the gay liberation movement."<sup>7</sup> In only

18; Brinkley et al., *American History*, 867; Boyer et al., *Enduring Vision*, 998, 1009; Freeman et al., *Who Built America?*, II, 552.

<sup>5</sup> Nash et al., *American People*, II, 992-93; Norton et al., *People and a Nation*, II, 920, 924, 958; Henretta et al., *America's History*, 985, 964; Divine et al., *America*, 912, 936; Faragher et al., *Our of Many*, 952, 951; Brinkley et al., *American History*, 934-35; Boyer et al., *Enduring Vision*, 1044, 1032-34, 1046; Jordan and Litwack, *United States*, 796, 837. On My Lai, see Freeman et al., *Who Built America?*, II, 571-72. On the shootings at Kent State but not Jackson State University, see *ibid.*, 604. For both campuses, but not My Lai, see Bailyn et al., *Great Republic*, II, 557, 581; and Thernstrom, *History of the American People*, 853.

<sup>6</sup> Henretta et al., *America's History*, 964; Nash et al., *American People*, II, 992; Boyer et al., *Enduring Vision*, 1032; Jordan and Litwack, *United States*, 836; Norton et al., *People and a Nation*, II, 924.

<sup>7</sup> Brinkley et al., *American History*, 929. For a fairly comprehensive treatment of the movement after Stonewall, see Nash et al., *American People*, II, 1039-40; Henretta et al., *America's History*, 961; Bailyn et al., *Great Republic*, II, 554; Freeman et al., *Who Built America?*, II, 590-93; and Norton et al., *People and a Nation*, II, 950-51.

one, *Out of Many*, the newest book reviewed here, is there an explanation of the long history leading up to Stonewall: the “two pioneering homophile organizations, the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis,” the Society for Individual Rights, and the growth of gay communities in New York, San Francisco, and elsewhere during the fifties. Two books, *The Enduring Vision* and *America: Past and Present*, omit Stonewall and deal with gays and lesbians only with the rise of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) in the eighties. Winthrop D. Jordan and Leon F. Litwack, in *The United States*, restrict their coverage to the statement that “by the mid-1960s, many other minority groups were modeling their protests after the civil rights movement—not only ethnic and racial minorities but prisoners, mental patients, the physically disabled, and homosexuals.” The gay and lesbian movement and the topic of homosexuality in general do not appear in Stephan Thernstrom’s *A History of the American People*.<sup>8</sup>

From these examples, it can be seen that the shared agreements on what distinguishes the sixties, especially the emphasis on civil rights and other social movements and the Vietnam War, constitute a lively view of the period that brings conflict and change to the foreground. A historiographical consensus may exist, but no one can accuse these authors of returning to the “consensus” view of American history.

Yet to a striking degree these textbooks repeat the same omissions; they do not evade the “turbulent” (a favorite word) character of the sixties, but much is scanted. Consider, for instance, the destabilization of American Catholicism. The significance of Pope John XXIII and Vatican II to what is arguably the single largest organized social group in this country—significant especially in debates over sexuality and contraception—is missing, as is the massive reform in church functioning symbolized by the abolition of the Latin Mass, which for many people was either a vital and exciting or a disturbing and alienating aspect of the sixties. Only *Who Built America?* covers this important topic.<sup>9</sup>

Complicated but telling silences can also be found in the combination of emerging consensus and continued exclusion around both the Black Power movement and Native American activism in the sixties, specifically in the depictions of the Black Panther Party (BPP) and the American Indian Movement (AIM).

None of these textbooks ignores the Black Power movement, and indeed there is a stimulating range of perspectives: from the brief treatment of “wild utterances by militant extremists” such as Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, and Huey Newton linked to the “black rage” of urban riots in Thernstrom’s *History of the American People* to the respectful coverage of Malcolm X’s life in many other texts. The most original examination is in *Who Built America?*, which refuses to demonize the massive wave of rioting in Northern ghettos from 1964 to 1968 by stressing that the “property destruction was targeted, not indiscriminate” and that, like anti-Tory violence in the American Revolution, “a rough sense of social justice”

<sup>8</sup> Faragher et al., *Out of Many*, 942; Boyer et al., *The Enduring Vision*, 1073; Divine et al., *America*, 994; Jordan and Litwack, *The United States*, 851.

<sup>9</sup> Freeman et al., *Who Built America?*, II, 581–82.

prevailed. Yet none of these books gives more than a paragraph to the Black Panther Party, and usually considerably less. This seems to fly in the face of a history we should all know—were the Panthers not the chief target of COINTELPRO (Counterintelligence Program), the nationwide campaign of interdiction and disruption by the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation)? The best treatments are in *Who Built America?*, which includes a photograph of a shot-up BPP storefront in Oakland, and in *Out of Many*, which is the only book to mention the police murder of Illinois Panther leader Fred Hampton. Even these are hardly sufficient: the BPP was the main revolutionary nationalist Black organization and one that literally transfixed white America. That its history has not yet been properly historicized does not explain why it should be left out, unless we accept the proposition that textbooks can offer no more than a synthesis of widely accepted monographic treatments.<sup>10</sup>

The treatment of AIM furnishes an even more explicit example of a consensus with a big hole in it. Most of these books include AIM's occupation of Alcatraz in 1969, the seizure of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in 1972, and the armed standoff the following year at the site of the 1890 Wounded Knee massacre. And most of these textbooks emphasize the militancy of Indian resistance; five include photographs of gun-waving AIM activists at Wounded Knee. In one sense, then, the Native American "armed struggle" is presented fairly, and some would say legitimated. Yet in another sense the reality of an armed struggle is obscured by an evocative image that too many students are likely to see in purely cinematic terms. There is no mention of the government-encouraged violence that engulfed some Plains reservations (for example, the GOONS, or Guardians of the Oglala Nation) nor of the numerous AIM sympathizers who were killed. Above all, where is Leonard Peltier and the legal case that has been a central emotive issue for everyone concerned with Native American rights for two decades? It has inspired both fictional and documentary Hollywood films and a well-known book, Peter Matthiessen's *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse*. The Peltier case, involving the killing of two FBI agents, brings in the history of COINTELPRO, which would allow authors to make useful connections between Black and Red Power and to explore the character of counterinsurgency at home.<sup>11</sup>

It would be easy to go on in this vein, detailing all of the harrowing, once-infamous events that do not appear in these textbooks—the 1971 Attica, New York, prison uprising, say—but such a catalog runs the risk of appearing to be special pleading for a post-1968 radical moment that no writer or historian has yet been able

<sup>10</sup> Thernstrom, *History of the American People*, 850. For Malcolm X, see Hentetta et al., *America's History*, 956–57; Faragher et al., *Out of Many*, 935–39; Brinkley et al., *American History*, 899–900; Jordan and Litwack, *United States*, 802–4; and Nash et al., *American People*, II, 1013–14. Freeman et al., *Who Built America?*, II, 557–58. For the Black Panther Party, see *ibid.*, 561–62; and Faragher et al., *Out of Many*, 938.

<sup>11</sup> For photographs at Wounded Knee, see Nash et al., *American People*, II, 1030–31; Hentetta et al., *America's History*, 950–51; Brinkley et al., *American History*, 926; Jordan and Litwack, *United States*, 807–8; and Freeman et al., *Who Built America?*, II, 589–90. For other vivid photographs and coverage, see Norton et al., *People and a Nation*, II, 982; Bailyn et al., *Great Republic*, II, 573; Faragher et al., *Out of Many*, 946; and Boyer et al., *Enduring Vision*, 1018, 1072. Peter Matthiessen, *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse* (New York, 1983).

to characterize.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, without any rush to judgment about self-censorship, I cannot help feeling that these authors have collectively dodged one of the hardest facts about the sixties: when it came to nonwhite activists, national, state, and local government agencies engaged in systematic repression. Most textbooks now deal forthrightly with the history of lynching in the South, among other fundamental but difficult truths. To duck what was done to the Black Panthers and AIM is no more justifiable, although confronting this history would make many instructors, department heads, campus administrators, and students uncomfortable and, perhaps, angry.

Finally—to underline that what is left in and who is left out is no simple matter of political affiliation—the systematic minimizing of one of the most crucial if enigmatic actors of the sixties, George Corley Wallace, is notable. He, of course, appears in each of these books, with passing references to his resistance to desegregating the University of Alabama in 1963 and the Selma, Alabama, march in 1965, with brief treatments of his third-party run in 1968, and an addendum on his wounding by Arthur Bremer during the 1972 Democratic primaries. But in no case does Wallace receive his due as a key figure of the postwar Democratic party along with Johnson and Kennedy. There are neither “boxed inserts” nor photographs of this hypnotic working-class white man, a genteel leapfrog that deprives students of an understanding they urgently need about race, class, and the South’s peculiar colonial status.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps the biggest problem of coverage is a paradoxical one, reflecting the strengths of the new consensus as much as any weakness and highlighting the entire problem of “narrativizing” a period in which crisis occurred on a worldwide scale and was in the fullest sense “overdetermined.” One can hardly complain that all of these authors place the defeat in Vietnam at the center of the coming apart of Cold War America. In virtually every text the war’s progress—from support for Ngo Dinh Diem in 1954 through the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964, from the escalation with ground troops, the massive bombings, and the Tet Offensive to Nixon’s “Vietnamization” plan—is portrayed with damning accuracy as a disaster. There is no sugarcoating the mistakes, and there is considerable clarity about why the United States lost. But by allowing Vietnam to stand in for the rest of the global Cold War after 1960, almost all of these books elide the character of United States-sponsored counterinsurgency in this period, as well as the way in which Cold War concerns shifted from direct confrontation with the Soviet Union in Western Europe to a focus on defeating Third World revolutionary nationalism.

For anyone familiar with the diplomatic history of these years, it is striking how many events of fundamental importance to huge numbers of people outside the

<sup>12</sup> For the only mention of this sorry tale, see Norton et al., *People and a Nation*, II, 959.

<sup>13</sup> Nash et al., *American People*, II, 977–78, 1010; Norton et al., *People and a Nation*, II, 939, 955, 961; Thernstrom, *History of the American People*, 851–52; Henretta et al., *America’s History*, 927, 954, 981; Divine et al., *America*, 928–29, 934, 938; Bailyn et al., *Great Republic*, II, 559–60, 578, 587; Faragher et al., *Out of Many*, 906, 907, 912, 949; Brinkley et al., *American History*, 581, 896, 914–15, 944; Boyer et al., *Enduring Vision*, 1002, 1010, 1014, 1041–42, 1057; Jordan and Litwack, *United States*, 783, 798, 800, 816–17, 839; Freeman et al., *Who Built America?*, II, 585–86, 604.

United States, in which our government played a central role, do not appear in these texts. For instance, only Jordan and Litwack, in *The United States*, bother to mention the 1965 events in Indonesia, when approximately half a million leftists were butchered within a few months in "one of the worst massacres of the twentieth century." And in only two books is there a mention of the 1964 coup in Brazil that set off a decade of military rule and bureaucratic authoritarianism throughout much of Latin America. These were not, and should not be seen as, minor examples of standard Cold War practice; Brazil and Indonesia are hardly insignificant countries, and the Central Intelligence Agency played a major role in both cases.<sup>14</sup>

Not putting Vietnam into a larger context of the postwar global political economy anchored by the United States ultimately has serious consequences for constructing an analytical rather than descriptive narrative, one that actually makes sense of the world students currently inhabit. Our students today were born in the mid-1970s; their lives have been bounded by the facts of, and the debate over, the loss of United States power during and since Vietnam. Yet only three of these textbooks acknowledge what one bluntly labels "the decline in American hegemony over the world system." The long-brewing crisis was signaled in 1971 when the United States suffered an unfavorable balance of trade for the first time since 1893, leading to Nixon's unilateral abrogation of the 1944 Bretton Woods agreement that had made the dollar the fixed unit of world exchange. This was an epochal event, and yet it barely registers. Most of us are aware of how difficult it is to teach any kind of economic history in a survey class, but that is, frankly, no excuse for avoiding a fall from power as decisive in its own way as was Watergate.<sup>15</sup>

Obviously, lapses in coverage are the biggest problem for any textbook, and also the easiest target for any reviewer; textbooks cannot just keep expanding, and recontextualizing the familiar ("I Have a Dream," the grunts in the Mekong Delta, Kennedy's charisma) with what is unfamiliar must remain their primary task. My purpose here is not to assail these authors for leaving out much of what I consider significant but to point out how uniform is the process of inclusion and exclusion, because the absences become self-reinforcing.

There is a further intriguing aspect of how textbooks categorize the era, however, that is the exact opposite of a too-confining consensus. Because of the confusion surrounding what the sixties was and was not, these texts demonstrate a remarkable

<sup>14</sup> Jordan and Litwack, *United States*, 810; Divine et al., *America*, 905; Norton et al., *People and a Nation*, II, 912-13.

<sup>15</sup> Henretta et al., *America's History*, 984. Only two other books examine this central moment. Freeman et al. have an entire section titled "The End of the 'American Century,'" where they point out that "American policymakers set the terms after 1945 for world capitalism's operation, not only determining the West's Cold War priorities but also establishing the dollar as the basis for international exchange." Freeman et al., *Who Built America?*, II, 610-11. Brinkley et al. link the political-economic fall from grace to Watergate: "Although it was political scandal that would ultimately destroy the Nixon presidency, an even more serious national crisis was emerging in the early 1970s: the decline of the American economy." Brinkley et al., *American History*, 945-47. For a passing mention of the end of the original Bretton Woods system, see Jordan and Litwack, *United States*, 833. For the United States going off the gold standard without any indication of the significance of that act, see Boyer et al., *Enduring Vision*, 1054; Faragher et al., *Out of Many*, 954; Divine et al., *America*, 931, 934; Bailyn et al., *Great Republic*, II, 577-78; and Norton et al., *People and a Nation*, II, 959.



lack of agreement on how to periodize those years. When does the period begin and end?

This question of periodization reflects the methodological conservatism affecting historians when they venture into the post-1945 era. On this terrain most of us retreat into dividing American history into presidential terms. Thus eight of these textbooks clearly break the postwar period at 1960, with the generational passing from Dwight D. Eisenhower to the appropriately youthful Kennedy presented as an explicit metaphor for the beginning of the sixties.

The problems thus begin almost immediately. All of the authors surveyed put the civil rights movement at the center of their history of the postwar United States, and therefore at the center of the sixties, if the latter is designated as the main period of social contestation and "turbulence." For this they should be applauded. Making the agency of African Americans a motive force and demonstrating that it is the pivot around which much else revolves seem wholly correct to me and I assume to most historians of contemporary America. Yet the form this consensus takes plays havoc with any clear-cut ideas of when the sixties begin and end, especially so with any easy equation of presidential terms and historical eras. Was the civil rights movement in its 1955-1965 heyday at the center of the sixties, or was it the prologue to something else more properly called the sixties? The confusion about this question often leads to splitting the narrative of the southern Black freedom movement among several chapters, so that, however much its centrality is asserted, the net effect is to make it a long-running problem for politicians rather than the actual center of political struggle.

Past 1960 in these textbooks, however, it is clear why historians fall back upon the convenient stick figure of JFK as a baseline; after that date any semblance of agreement dissolves, and the alternative periodizations suggest a crazy quilt of tentative hypotheses about both beginnings and endings. Sometimes the sixties shrink into a few frenzied years, and sometimes they expand, effectively diminishing the seventies to a half decade and setting up the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 as the next key watershed. In some cases, the authors deal with their own uncertainties about the past thirty-five years with chapters that overlap chronologically—no periodization at all! Thus Mary Beth Norton and her coauthors in *A People and a Nation* follow a traditional chapter on the Eisenhower years with "American Society during the Baby Boom, 1945-1964," "Vietnam and the Cold War: American Foreign Policy, 1961-1977," and then "Reform and Conflict: A Turbulent Era in America, 1961-1973" and "A Disillusioned People: Watergate, Stagflation, and Global Decline, 1973-1981." Robert A. Divine et al., in *America*, begin with a chapter titled "Affluence and Anxiety: From the Fair Deal to the Great Society" (roughly 1946-1965) and proceed to "Vietnam and the Escalating Cold War, 1953-1968," and "Protest and Reaction: From Vietnam to Watergate" (covering 1965-1974). Bernard Bailyn and his coauthors, in *The Great Republic*, explicitly define the sixties as the presidencies of Kennedy and Johnson from 1960 to 1968 in "The Modern Republic in Turmoil: The Sixties"; they see the events of 1968 as the "last gasp" of the sixties and 1969 as the beginning of "a frustrating decade"

defined as "An Elusive Stability: The Modern Republic, 1969–1980." Paul S. Boyer et al., in *The Enduring Vision*, follow a chapter on "The Turbulent Sixties" from 1960 to 1968 with "A Troubled Journey: From Port Huron to Watergate," covering the years 1962 to 1974. Perhaps most oddly, Jordan and Litwack's *The United States* has one chapter covering the Eisenhower and Kennedy presidencies, "Superpowers in the Missile Age" (1952–1963), and then one chapter, "Crumbling Consensus," covering only the four years of the Johnson presidency, which are explicitly defined as the sixties, followed by "The Politics of Righteousness: Nixon and Carter," spanning 1968 to 1980.<sup>16</sup>

No matter which of the above you find most appropriate or useful, the teacher has a real selection, and a very stimulating one. The only thing approaching a consensus is to be found in the six textbooks that in one fashion or another define the sixties as ending in 1974 with Nixon's resignation amid the chaos of Watergate, which seems reasonable. I myself am intrigued by Gary B. Nash et al., who combine the sixties and the seventies into a single chapter on "The Rise and Fall of the Liberal State, 1960–1980," in *The American People*.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting approach to this problem of periodizing the sixties is in *America's History* by James A. Henretta et al. The authors resolutely step outside the presidential terms paradigm with a chapter titled "The Struggles for Equality and Diversity, 1954–1975." From its dramatic opening with a full-page reproduction of the poster for a 1968 farm workers' benefit at Carnegie Hall, through an extraordinary two-page feature on Ella Baker (which links the history of Black institutional politics from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or NAACP, to the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, or SNCC, with women's liberation), and its excellent coverage of such features of the "high," or late sixties, as COINTELPRO and the fight over People's Park in Berkeley, California, this is clearly a superior account. Rather than bringing to the fore any specific event, movement, or person, the chapter works so well because of its emphasis on the relationships among different social movements over a single, long stretch of time: the chapter opens with the assertion that "The 1960s are often portrayed as a time of social protest and upheaval. Yet the era of questioning and confrontation was not confined to a single decade. From the early 1950s through the mid-1970s, new issues and movements crowded the national agenda." This is a consensus-breaker, and a very necessary one!<sup>18</sup>

I highlight this approach because it points to a more useful way of teaching the entire period, through fully thematizing distinct areas of history. *Out of Many*, by John Mack Faragher et al., for instance, has an excellent chapter on "Civil Rights

<sup>16</sup> Norton et al., *People and a Nation*, II, 879–904, 905–34, 935–64, 965–94; Divine et al., *America*, 854–89, 890–915, 916–43; Bailyn et al., *Great Republic*, II, 518–64, 565–609, esp. 565; Boyer et al., *Enduring Vision*, 996–1027, 1028–63; Jordan and Litwack, *United States*, 765–94, 795–830, 831–62.

<sup>17</sup> Divine et al., *America*; Faragher et al., *Out of Many*; Brinkley et al., *American History*; Boyer et al., *Enduring Vision*; Freeman et al., *Who Built America?*, II; Thernstrom, *History of the American People*. Nash et al., *American People*, II, 964–1003.

<sup>18</sup> Henretta et al., *America's History*, 945–76, esp. 945.

and the Great Society, 1945–1966,” that stresses the century-long “black protest tradition” and has the best coverage of SNCC, the New Left’s single most important formation. (It is also the only book to indicate the full range of Martin Luther King Jr.’s ideological affiliations—not just with Mahatma Gandhi, but also with Karl Marx.) Thernstrom’s *A History of the American People*, while skipping over much political-cultural data found in other books, has a valuable emphasis on quantifiable social history and long-term demographic changes, as in a chapter on “Recent Social and Economic Trends” from the 1940s right through the 1980s.<sup>19</sup>

Could we not hope to broaden this thematic approach with chapters on the Vietnam War from the fall of Dien Bien Phu in 1954 through the fall of Saigon in 1975, or on the Cold War from the promulgation of NSC-68 in 1950 through the events of the early 1970s (when Nixon played the “China card” while accepting defeat in Vietnam)? Such diversity would indeed make it harder for textbook authors and their publishers to define and hold on to their market—how do you compare apples and oranges?—and ultimately would place a greater responsibility on teachers to define their own syntheses and periodization(s) of the recent past, a responsibility that would have a salutary effect.

Of course, a largely thematic approach runs the risk that students with a very shaky grasp of the chronology of post-World War II America (let alone of what came before) will become even more confused when confronted with multiple trajectories. In my own experience, however, it has been effective to walk students through a history of Cold War politics, foreign and domestic, and then build on that account in tracing both the social-cultural history of the period and the story of political dissent and disaggregation. Others may find it more useful to teach the chronological blocks (1952–1960, 1960–1968) in sequence, via one or more textbook chapters that encompass the political, diplomatic, economic, social, and cultural history of each period. (In cataloging treatments of the sixties, it became clear that many of the writers with highly heterodox approaches to the post-1960 decades had succeeded in providing an integrated approach to the fifties by stressing the overarching effects of a Keynesian politics of abundance in tension with the political imperatives of the Cold War.) These are all legitimate approaches, but the point is to be able to choose among them rather than to have one’s choice dictated.

Textbook depictions of the very recent past have a special and distinct character; not only are many of the persons described still alive, but the political and cultural controversies are not yet sufficiently “past” to have acquired the patina of settled fact. To apply a little theory, their facticity is still in doubt and could possibly be overturned (think of Reconstruction). It is necessary in the end, therefore, to confront not just the textual politics of these books but their political *effects*.

As is the case with most history writing, the politics in the eleven textbooks anatomized here are mostly submerged and subtextual: what comes to the fore, what is written off, the adjectival tricks of which we as teachers are well aware.

<sup>19</sup> Faragher et al., *Out of Many*, 891–924; Thernstrom, *History of the American People*, 810–27.

Other than the predilection many of these authors share for frankly partisan and brutal assessments of President Nixon's character, or for the labeling of particular leftists as "extremists" to signal a moderate stance, none of these textbooks (with the exception of *Who Built America?*) plainly states what the stakes are in thinking about that amorphous era known as the sixties. How can they, after all? It is all too fresh, and too disturbing, for too many people.

Unfortunately, the result of this equivocation is a kind of "me-too" liberalism—the same kind of liberal positioning on subjects such as Vietnam, civil rights, and youth rebellion that is hegemonic on network television comedies and dramas (and a good thing too). My point is that college-level American history textbooks by leading scholars ought to take students deeper into the substance of politics rather than implying that it is just a matter of competing generational stances. With some significant exceptions noted, the effect of reading these textbooks is to inform students about *what* happened, at least through 1968, with considerable clarity, but not *why* it happened, except as some sort of natural and inevitable sequence. Few students are going to absorb from the current textbooks the central and elemental truth that the political struggles of Left and Right that began in the sixties are not by any stretch of the imagination complete. Now that we are halfway through the 1990s and feeling the shock of a new, vertiginous epoch in our national progress, I would submit that such an approach is no longer sufficient. We are in the midst of a great national debate over what went wrong (or right) in the sixties and who should be blamed (or honored), best captured by Speaker Newt Gingrich's tantalizing designation of the president and First Lady as unreconstructed "counterculture McGoverniks." Framing the terms of that debate clearly, starkly, even polemically—by analyzing the positions of Barry Goldwater versus Malcolm X in 1964, for instance—is exactly the kind of contribution that we as historians can make in our teaching. It seems to me this is a civic responsibility historians should accept and textbooks should encourage. Not incidentally, it would help students grasp the fact that this is the "history" that made their immediate world and framed their choices, politically, socially, economically, and sexually. I cannot imagine anything that would make the teaching of basic American history livelier, more fun, or more intellectually productive—for all of us.

#### TEXTBOOKS REVIEWED

*America: Past and Present*. Third edition. By Robert A. Divine, T. H. Breen, George M. Fredrickson, and R. Hal Williams. (New York: HarperCollins, 1991. xxviii, 1009 pp. ISBN 0-673-38864-6.)

*American History: A Survey*. Eighth edition. By Alan Brinkley, Richard N. Current, Frank Freidel, and T. Harry Williams. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991. cxxiii, 994 pp. ISBN 0-07-015026-5.)

*The American People: Creating a Nation and a Society*. Vol. 2: *Since 1865*. Third edition. By Gary B. Nash, Julie Roy Jeffrey, John R. Howe, Peter J. Frederick, Allen F. Davis, and Allan M. Winkler. (New York: HarperCollins, 1994. xxi, 556 pp. ISBN 0-06-501057-4.)

*America's History*. Second edition. By James A. Henretta, W. Elliot Brownlee, David Brody, and Susan Ware. (New York: Worth, 1993. xxxiv, 1037 pp. ISBN 0-87901-552-7.)

*The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People.* Second edition. By Paul S. Boyer, Clifford E. Clark Jr., Joseph F. Kett, Neal Salisbury, Harvard Sitkoff, and Nancy Woloch. (Lexington: Heath, 1993. cxlv, 1114 pp. ISBN 0-669-28114-X.)

*The Great Republic: A History of the American People.* Vol. 2. Fourth edition. By Bernard Bailyn, Robert Dallek, David Brion Davis, David Herbert Donald, John L. Thomas, and Gordon S. Wood. (Lexington: Heath, 1992. cviii, 656 pp. ISBN 0-669-20986-4.)

*A History of the American People.* Vol. 2: *Since 1965.* Second edition. By Stephan Thernstrom. (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989. xi, 481 pp. ISBN 0-15-536534-7.)

*Out of Many: A History of the American People.* Combined edition. By John Mack Faragher, Mari Jo Buhle, Daniel Czitrom, and Susan H. Armitage. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1994. xxxii, 1029 pp. ISBN 0-13-556599-5.)

*A People & a Nation: A History of the United States.* Vol. 2: *Since 1865.* Third edition. By Mary Beth Norton, David M. Katzman, Paul D. Escott, Howard P. Chudacoff, Thomas G. Paterson, and William M. Tuttle Jr. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990. xviii, 590 pp. ISBN 0-395-43309-6.)

*The United States.* Combined edition. Seventh edition. By Winthrop D. Jordan and Leon F. Litwack. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1991. xvi, 928 pp. ISBN 0-13-933524-2.)

*Who Built America? Working People and the Nation's Economy, Politics, Culture, & Society.* Vol. 2: *From the Gilded Age to the Present.* By Joshua Freeman, Nelson Lichtenstein, Stephen Brier, David Bensman, Susan Porter Benson, David Brundage, Bret Eynon, Bruce Levine, and Bryan Palmer. (New York: Pantheon, 1992. xxviii, 723 pp. ISBN 0-394-58650-6.)