

## **CALIFORNIA TEXTBOOKS' DAYBREAK OF RECKONING**

427

*factual errors stir buzz*

*No improvement until  
adoption process fixed*

*Democratize textbook  
approvals, study says*

In the week of September 25, 2006 – climaxing an arduous pioneer venture – we faxed to over 1800 California public middle schools our rating sheet on five new 8<sup>th</sup> grade U.S. History texts approved for adoption there. We then snail mailed the same info (on page 5 of this newsletter) to 400-plus California Christian middle schools statewide. Our goals were to influence sales of these books; to win rule changes making textbooks up for adoption more available for public inspection; and to show why California, which currently state-approves only K-8 texts, should state-approve high school books too. Never have reviewers gained such access to submitted California sample texts, as this. Never have conservatives probed them so deeply, as here. Never have non-Californians so filled the state with their findings, as now. And what we found, California must heed.

### **unaccountability**

We found in California textbooks a higher factual-error rate than in Texas. In 2002 we reviewed four Texas high school U.S. History books whose total page count about equaled these five California 8<sup>th</sup> grade U.S. History texts. In the Texas books we found 249 factual errors; in California's, 427. Why the difference? *California's state textbook approval process curtails public access to submitted samples*, while Texas' promotes it. (Our press release details this on page 4 inside.) Poor editing is more likely in California because publishers know California is less likely to catch or punish it. The factual-error problem is to the point where publishers are virtually daring the state not to act. Not until Californians can check out submitted samples at display centers for thorough home review – starting in May each year as in Texas – will California get a handle on it.

We also found, as our rating sheet notes, that these "final," "corrected" California editions shortchanged big U.S. History topics like the American Revolution, constitutional issues, and

free-market economic perspectives. How did this pass California muster? Either education officials liked it that way, or the number of textbooks submitted overwhelmed the review panels (the five 8<sup>th</sup> grade U.S. History texts alone ran to about 4000 pages and took us eight months to critique). And though California school districts may "pilot" the new books for a year before choosing one, nothing says localities must first read them, so some adopt more or less blindly without piloting. Californians getting *more access to more submitted samples soon after their annual filing with the state* is the only democratic check and balance capable of monitoring publisher accountability.

### **the myth of "local control"**

The knock on California state-approving high school textbooks is that it would erode local control. But single school districts have zero quality control over textbooks and no market power to improve them. They must take or leave what is. On textbooks, *"local control" means "no control."* The public school textbook market is an oligopoly. A few big publishers dominate. State-approval levels this playing field. It is necessary to textbook reform. Publishers will cater to large states that state-approve like California. With that market leverage California can reform high school textbooks as well. Moreover, unlike single school districts, California can enact fines to deter publishers from sending substandard texts into its classrooms. Had publishers sold Texas books with 427 factual errors, a Texas rule levies fines of up to \$5000 per error, or over \$2 million.