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# Taking Offense: An Exploration of Racist, Misleading, and Problematic Language in Textbooks

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# Taking Offense

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## An Exploration of Racist, Misleading, and Problematic Language in Textbooks

By  
Hevin N Robertson

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for Graduation from the  
Western Oregon University Honors Program

Dr. Ken Carano  
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## Working Abstract

This thesis explores perceptions of racist language used in three secondary education social science textbooks. It will look at a textbook from each of the three main publishing companies in the United States. Included in this research is one very controversial textbook that recently came under fire for racist language. The sections in textbooks and their recent adaptations depicting American enslavement will be studied, as it is a topic that is underrepresented in American textbooks. This project will focus on identifying racist, misleading, and problematic language in textbooks and begin to delve into the potential effects of language utilized in secondary education history classrooms.

Racism is a topic that is difficult to measure or quantify, therefore experts in the field will be deferred to in order to define perceived racism and other major definitions necessary for this thesis. By analyzing and comparing the language used in these textbooks, attention will be drawn to potentially silent or hidden racism. Also, an intent of this thesis is to inform people that racism is not always hateful or obvious in design. The main aim of this thesis is to draw attention to any racist, misleading, or problematic language found, explain why it may be racist, and discuss the potential impact of the language to people who perceive racism in the textbooks.

## Introduction

Many teachers and instructors rely on textbooks as a supplement for student learning, or as an aide in planning instruction and determining what to teach to students. Textbooks end up teaching certain events in history to students, as it is a simple and cost effective method for students to get a broad understanding of a topic with little to no effort on the teacher's part. While not the best teaching method, in some instances teachers must rely on the textbook because of a lack of knowledge on their part or a lack of funds to provide supplementary materials not supplied by the school district. The purpose of this paper is to define racist language in textbooks, as well as to discuss the possible implications this language has in the classroom. I will examine three textbooks, one each from McGraw-Hill, McDougal Littell (owned by Houghton Mifflin Company), and Prentice Hall (owned by Pearson Plc.). These three textbook companies are the largest academic publishers in the United States, and due to their position as a popular medium for learning, they control a great deal of information exposed to students during their elementary and secondary educational experiences.

For this thesis, the language in these textbooks will be examined in every page that deals with the human trafficking and enslavement of Blacks. The purpose is to look for racist or problematic language with a focus on omissions of historically important events concerning the human trafficking and enslavement of Blacks. The language used in these sections determines the tone of the topic of enslavement and encourages students to view the topic in the same light as it is taught. If the language in the

textbooks is derogatory, or has hidden racial content, this will lead students to view the topic negatively without citation or further instruction from the educator.

### **Key Terms**

Racism is the biggest key term for this thesis, and as such, demands a lengthy definition composed of several pieces. Etymologically, racism is made up of the prefix, “rac,” which is an alternate spelling of race, and the suffix, “ism,” meaning discrimination based on a certain attribute or characteristic with the thought that one’s own race is superior (Oxford Dictionary, 2018). Racism for this thesis is first defined as follows: racism is “any action or attitude, conscious or unconscious, that subordinates an individual or group based on skin colour or race,” which was taken from a previous United States Civil Rights Commission report of which access is no longer available. This thesis puts a large emphasis on the “unconscious” part of that partial definition, as racism does not have to be as blunt as ethnophaulisms, or ethnic slurs, and can be something hard to notice.

Furthermore, this study also puts a large emphasis on the institutionalized characteristic of racism; racism needs to be understood as a systematic process and not just one hurdle designed by one bigoted person to negatively affect someone with different features. Racism can be something on an individual basis, but in a culture such as in the United States, racism has permeated all social norms and systems set in place. Racism is a *system* of advantage based on race, and needs to be viewed as such (Wellman, 1994). In the United States, there is a culture of racism which is defined as “the cultural images and messages that affirm the assumed superiority of Whites and

the assumed inferiority of people of color” (Rothenburg & Munshi, 2016). People who are not White, like the colonizers of the Americas, are seen as inferior and treated inferior by both citizens and the governmental systems set in place. This is affirmed through cursory evidence in various studies such as ones that study the large divide in wealth between people of color and Whites; prison populations that are not racially proportionate to the population of the United States; minorities being prescribed less pain medication for injuries than Whites with the similar conditions; (Stayton, 2007) Racism is as much a part of American culture as stereotypical images like the bald eagle, or as American as apple pie, as the popular saying goes. So, for this thesis, racism is truly racism and not simply prejudice when it is systematic and widespread.

Stereotypes and prejudice are similar to racism in definition, and can be used in racist ways, but are not necessarily synonyms. A stereotype is the process in which people marginalize a group of people by assuming common themes and generalizing that group to all fit the same mold. Prejudice, on the other hand, is a preconceived judgment that is usually based on little information out of a lack of understanding or knowledge of a group. To further explain, a stereotype is more commonly applied to a group, where prejudice is that same attitude applied to an individual. Both can be used to reinforce racist ideas, but aren't necessarily always racist, as there are prejudices and stereotypes against age, sexuality, gender, and class status.

Language is seen as racist when it offensively denotes a person based on skin color, race, or ethnicity. Racist language is not always a smack in the face as racial slurs are; they can be subtle, or “hidden,” and can be viewed — on firsthand accounts — to



be a completely acceptable fact, sentence, or phrase. One example of hidden racism is when an elected official doesn't call out a racist organization after a peaceful protester was run over by one of its members and likened the two groups to be of equal blame, despite one group purporting racist and violent connotation that ended in someone's death, while the other group was protesting the hate that group championed; the official did not say anything racist, but one can infer by their silence on the matter as a racist intent. It is only when language is truly examined, and racist language is understood, that it can be identified as such. This racist language is what will primarily be explored, as the language in textbooks will be subtler than the words a racist might say to someone of the race that they apply hate speech. It can be unnoticeable except for an odd feeling about the sentence that doesn't sit right; it needs to be further examined to understand and prevent.

Some of the common types of racist language are romanticism and dehumanization. Romanticism is a style of literature that emphasizes emotions and the imagination. Romanticism is used in texts sometimes to make slavery appear less horrific than it is. An example of this would be if a textbook omitted the horrors of the Middle Passage, and instead focused on the new journey the enslaved people "went on," as opposed to "forced to go," to the Americas and Caribbean. Dehumanization refers to people as "slaves" instead of as people, and continually refuse to mention that the enslaved are people at all. Not explaining sections where enslaved people are mentioned to not be people, such as in the Dred Scott trial has a similar way of dehumanizing enslaved peoples. It shows past "evidence" that enslaved people are

nothing more than property, and does not explain to students that this view was outdated and wrong, as textbooks have explained other terrible events like the Holocaust.

### **The Importance of Enslavement in Modern United States Culture**

Enslavement is still a relevant topic in the United States. The continual discrimination in the United States enforces this belief. With recent events like the protests in Ferguson, as well as continual attacks on unarmed Blacks by police officers, or in hate crimes across the country. Furthermore, there is still modern examples of enslavement, as people are forced into human sex trafficking or forced to work for others because of their status as undocumented workers as mentioned in an article by *Newsroom* published in August 20th, 2013. Modern day enslavement has less of a focus on race, but brings up memories of the United States' not so distant past. Enslavement is one of the worst acts perpetrated by colonists and United States citizens in the Americas and Caribbean, along with the genocide of aboriginal peoples; it is not something that can be pushed under the rug and ignored or omitted from history, as a small movement has attempted and is currently attempting.

People must move forward and address inequalities and racial discrimination instead of pretending it doesn't exist or refusing to acknowledge it and letting it remain as a shadow of the past. Learning about enslavement in textbooks is crucial to the diverse history of students in the United States, as it gives a history of a racially marginalized group and takes away from the all-White, all-male version of history that textbooks are slowly moving away from as they attempt to capitalize on the movement

to become more diverse and beat out other textbooks for the educators' favorite textbook to use in the classroom.

However, in some regions of the United States, the movement to make history more diverse is not happening. In an article on slavery, James Loewen, mentions the movement to change language in the enslavement sections in textbooks, and student-led protests that occurred in order to protest racist language, omissions of slavery, or to honor the unsung heroes of civil rights movements (Loewen, 2000). Students want to hear more about enslavement and civil rights movements as they still struggle with discrimination, disadvantage, and the movement to erase key areas of history. This movement is central to southern states like Texas, but Texas houses some of the most popular textbook publishers, and they adhere to new Texas educational standards to remain in business. A report on the standards, "Taking Politics Out of Classrooms: Recommendations for Revising the Texas Social Studies Curriculum Standards," states, "...one board member even argued that slavery had really been just an 'after issue' or 'side issue' of the [Civil] war. So the history standards place slavery last – behind 'sectionalism' and 'states' rights' – in the list of causes" (2018). This issue of a board of uninformed individuals deciding educational standards for most of the country unfortunately leads to a smaller, more local problem potentially holding the power to become a huge issue that affects most of the United States.

In order to foster a healthy relationship in the classroom, the needs of all students have to be accounted for, and this movement to rid textbooks on the history of enslavement only hinders that. A growing percentage of students are students of color,

and they need to have a more representational history than they get to see in textbooks. Ignoring past racial slights creates a us-versus-them mentality between White and Black students and gives the impression of White dominated classroom culture, which is unfair to any non-White student and diminishes the worldliness of White students as they have not been taught multiple perspectives that could enrich the classroom as a whole. Moreover, teachers can bring racism into the classroom even when they are well-meaning; they can be unintentionally racist even when trying to be diverse and inclusive. For instance, a teacher can choose to have students teach Latin American history because of lack of interest due to it being not being a part of White-centrist history; however, this forces uneducated students to attempt to master the knowledge of how to teach, and leads to students not learning about the subject from someone who went to school specifically with the purpose to learn how to instruct and educate and denies Latin American students from learning their own history. Even in a majority or all-White classroom, it is important for students to learn the difficult parts of their racial history to understand other perspectives and grow from past mistakes.

Unfortunately, right now the majority perspective on enslavement is to ignore teaching it and remove segments on enslavement from textbooks. The latter system is evident from Alter's article discussion on how a Milwaukie school district struggled to find textbooks that satisfied teachers in regards to teaching sensitive topics such as racism, sexism, and rights movements. It provides a real-life examples of the educator's struggles to ensure that their classrooms have diverse, multi-faceted textbooks that promote equality and have minimal problems with racism and sexism. It details the

compromises that school districts are forced to take from textbook publishers because of the oligopoly they have in production, with the article detailing the school district's difficulty to obtain supplementary material included with a textbook that never even mentions the word "racism." It also mentions other problems with textbooks besides the lack of good representation: there are major problems with textbooks failing to capture students' attention, with teachers using textbooks as a crutch for when they do not understand a topic and unfortunately lack the effort to learn it, and with the necessity for teachers to find supplementary materials and primary sources in order to accurately teach social studies (Alter, 2009).

Furthermore, the lack of instruction leads to a system where future educators never learn about the history of enslavement and do not feel comfortable teaching it, and so their students do not learn about it and the cycle continues (Brown, 2011). Keffrelyn Brown, in their article "Breaking the Cycle of Sisyphus: Social Education and the Acquisition of Critical Sociocultural Knowledge about Race and Racism in the United States," discusses the findings from multiple studies of social science textbooks that portray racial violence against Blacks and how teachers are not taught how to teach racism and as such it leads to violence; this increases racially-motivated crimes in schools against Black Americans. The article also mentions that teachers aren't educated on how to teach about races and as such are unprepared when the topic comes up in the classroom. The author also in depth talks about the language in textbooks and how it can be seen as offensive or racist. The author cites a source about the effect of "colorblind" philosophy in classroom and how teachers will often "steer clear" of

teaching about races even in appropriate subjects out of lack of knowledge and fear of coming off in a bad light.

This cycle Brown mentioned needs to be broken, and starts with this next generation of students, who are more diverse and open than previous generations. This generation sees the strife and racial tension in the present, and wants to learn more about how this racial turmoil started so it can finally come to an end. Without understanding the beginnings of racial discrimination, it cannot end, as the problems behind it are not addressed or solved.

### **Textbook Language Effects**

Research on the effects of textbooks show that the language is damning. When students read excerpts from a textbook that characterizes a specific ethnicity, such as a textbook that stereotyped Hispanics as lazy and greedy. It caused a deep cultural rift in the classroom that damaged the classroom community and effected how willing the Hispanic students were to be open to new class material; it also made the students question the previous taught knowledge, as well (Walker, 2016). Students were no longer willing to be a part of the classroom community and attempt to learn after being stereotyped as lazy and greedy based on their race. This is an unfortunate effect of damaging language in textbooks on a classroom that is more diverse than the textbook.

Another article on how students react to textbook language centered around a Texas textbook. Research conducted by Barry Glassner shows that there is correlation between omission in textbooks centered around minorities, particularly Blacks, and the omissions used in the media when talking about a police shooting or otherwise harming

unarmed Black suspects. Glassner states that the lack of discussion around differing cultures leads to fear and misunderstanding that could potentially turn to violence. This article focuses on how certain textbooks in Texas stereotype Black men as being lazy and highlight instances of Black aggression. These characteristics are indoctrinated to young students, who grow up with a prejudice that is just reinforced through sources that were meant to educate them. Some of the language that Naomi Reed, the author of the article, found in these damaging textbooks was eerily similar to language used after violence against Blacks by the perpetrators, which shows an uncomfortable correlation in textbook language and actual violence in and outside of the classroom (Reed, 2015).

Along with the previous article, a study was done by K. D. Brown and A. L. Brown to examine elementary and middle school textbooks, Brown and Brown discuss the impacts of the portrayal of racial violence in textbooks. Their study talks about how they looked at the issues presented in the textbook, such as loss of life, property, and educational opportunities, and whether or not the information presented in the textbook was relevant or mentioned these ongoing issues. They also discuss problems with the portrayals of African Americans in textbooks, including using one-dimensional narratives; positioning as an essentialized construct; and presenting partial or inaccurate stories. They cite numerous studies including one that provided evidence that the standard way of teaching in K-12 classrooms significantly impacts African-American students, both in matters of self-esteem and with how they interact with other groups of students. Moreover, Brown and Brown provide a critical argument on how racial

equality stories such as *Brown vs. Board of Education* and other key Civil Right Movement events actually distort the public image of racism and help hide racism by taking attention away from current issues today by making it seem like those events ended racism (Brown and Brown, 2010). Language, from the evidence presented in this study, has the potential to cause issues in students such as confusion, insecurity, feelings of helplessness, and tension between groups.

Educators, moreover, have noticed that the White male dominated culture that is utilized when writing textbooks is damaging to students who do not identify as White and male. Nicholas Ferroni, an educator, discusses the main flaw in the Education system that he perceives: teachers use textbooks that promote hateful values such as sexism and racism. This indoctrination of students leads to them having racist and sexist views themselves as they are taught to follow a teacher's beliefs, accept the material to pass a certain class, and do well in school. Nicholas Ferroni, an educator and historian, argues that students are encouraged to become sexist and racist in order to succeed (2012). History textbooks tend to focus on White men, and ignore people of color and women in the writings, somewhat due to outdated historical views that are still prevalent, and partly due to the resistance against diversity in textbooks. Harriet Tubman is a more influential figure to students nowadays as a Black woman who fought against a morally incorrect system by being part of a resistance rather than Paul Revere, who was not even the only midnight rider, as Sybil Ludington did similarly in New York and is omitted from textbooks (Ferroni, 2012).



By omitted stories of people of color and women, these minorities are devalued and excluded from learning their own history. Students are mentally removed from the classroom because they are not learning their history and instead are learning someone else's; instead of students learning a diverse, multifaceted history, they are limited with the history of White males.

To further emphasize this, Slate magazine did a study on the gender representation in historical non-fiction books, and who was actually writing them. They found that only a quarter of popular history non-fiction authors are women, and most only contribute to the sections on women's, or other minorities, history. Imogen Robertson, chair of the Historical Writers Association in the United Kingdom stated, "For me, the gender bias is horribly clear when you look at what women are supposed to write about: men write the grand expansive histories, the thesis-driven revisionist world views, and they mostly have the second world war to themselves. Women are allowed to write about, well, women" (Flood, 2016). Women have to decide between writing an expansive textbook that would most likely be ignored by most major publication companies, or collaborating on popular textbooks in the hopes of getting some representation. Unfortunately, figures for the represented races in history have not occurred to the scale of Slate magazine's study, but it can be inferred that other minorities face similar statuses in textbooks.

#### Literature Review

Racism is a difficult topic in the United States. Most people accept and understand it is still very prevalent, however there are a growing number of people who

ignore any evidence and instead claim that the United States is inclusive, and it is just a number of bigoted White men who are at fault for the majority of any racist actions taken or that Whites are discriminated against as well, so any focus on discrimination should focus on that (DiAngelo, 2011). This is reinforced through the education system, which teaches students that the racism in history is more on the individual rather than the past social climate. “Students’ socialization gives them little alternative but to see racism as individual prejudice or hostile actions between people of different races” (Schmidt, 2005). They are taught that discrimination is illegal in the workplace, in private business, in schools, etc. but are not taught that racism was something entrenched in every level of the government and still persists in shady practices — such as gerrymandering — today.

### **History of the Topic**

Since the segregation of African Americans and Whites, it was evident that the United States education system was faced with difficulties about equality. White students received better structured schools, newer books, more experienced teachers, and better opportunities to learn; various historical records document how Black students were left with what barely constituted as an education system with fewer and far-between schools, older damaged books and unqualified teachers, which is a trend that continues today (Darling-Hammond, 1998). One of the biggest problems with the education system was the lack of inclusivity; White history was taught to African Americans and Black history or Black historical figures were left out. Most of these problems still consist today in predominantly-minority schools. Over the decades, the

importance in learning about slavery and the Civil Rights movement in the United States has grown to where it would be difficult to find textbooks that didn't mention either issue; however, in recent years there has been a push in the main textbook production companies to neglect these topics, specifically in regards to the history of enslavement and enslaved people in the United States.

Studies on Blacks in textbooks have taken place since the 1940s. The very first study took place ten years after the distribution of a NAACP pamphlet that criticized how textbooks portrayed minorities at the time. The study, conducted by the American Council on Education, determined that the language in textbook was "distressingly inadequate, inappropriate and even damaging to intergroup relations." The report further went on to describe how the history of minorities was written in a way that ignored contemporary contexts, with some races being stereotyped as "cruel" or "primitive" (as cited in Simms, 1975). The adjectives used were incredibly inconsistent but held negative connotations. A follow up study in the 1960s found a similar pattern of using stereotypes, distorting history through omission or romanticism, and misleading portrayals of races. As these education studies continued, they kept having similar findings that textbooks in the United States "omitted minorities, diminishing or ignoring the long history of violence and injustice against them" (as cited in Wirtenberg, Murez, and Alspektor, 1980).

Another one of these studies was conducted by a teacher in New York who compiled a report on the differences in the portrayals of Blacks between the 1950s and current textbooks of the time and found that the depictions reinforced negative

stereotypes of Blacks as urban, low class, blue-collar workers for the most part. These textbooks mentioned Blacks solely based on then-current stereotypes which viewed Blacks as poor service workers or as athletes. In the textbooks, Turetsky determined that “no blacks were shown in such professional positions as doctor, lawyer, or teacher in the 1950s books... [sic] in the 1970s textbooks [Blacks] were still shown in the sports and entertainment fields or in service work more than twice as often as they were shown in professional work” (Turetsky, 1974).

After the 1960s period of criticism, public attention caused a rush to try and correct the problems in textbooks and literature. This approach was labeled “color me brown” in criticism, as it rebranded characters as minorities, but worked to exclude differences between cultural portrayals and worked to make minorities look no different than Whites. This essentially erased and occluded rich cultural histories of minorities and idealized a new “whiter” race for minorities. This approach was further criticized for denying people an insight into other races and celebrate racial differences, (as cited in Wirtenberg, Murez, and Alspektor, 1980).

### **Current Matter on the Topic**

Throughout the decades, publishers continued to make small, superfluous changes in response to public outcries. This has never been to a level where people find equal representation of races in textbooks without problems with the portrayals being offensive or contentious in some part. Continuously, studies on the language in textbooks have found numerous issues with the portrayal of minorities and everyone who is not a White man. Currently, there are issues with the peculiarities of language in

textbooks, especially considering Blacks. For being a large amount of the population in the United States, Blacks are underrepresented in current history books and are only consistently mentioned in the colonization, reconstruction, and civil rights eras. In these sections, there are numerous problems with stereotyping, historical distortions, omissions, and romanticism.

Stereotypical images of Blacks have been portrayed in textbooks since long before the issue was noticed in the 1940s. In the 1970s, it was shown that these stereotypes were heavier in Southern textbooks, some of which ignored the issue of enslavement altogether. When enslavement was mentioned in Southern textbooks, Melton McLaurin found that “slaves were portrayed as well-treated and happy; for example, “Most masters treat slaves kindly. The plantation wife is the best friend the Negroes have, and they know it” (as cited in Wirtenberg, Murez, and Alspektor, 1980). These stereotypical images of Blacks were early identified, though besides calling attention to them, educators were not quite sure exactly what to do to solve the problem besides portray more examples of Black heroes and role models in textbooks. Modern stereotypes of Blacks focus on portraying them as pliant, yet hopeful-for-freedom enslaved persons, or as hard blue collar workers.

Historical distortions are one of the biggest problems with the textbook portrayals of Blacks. This is done in numerous ways including: alluding to discriminatory acts without directly addressing or discussing such things; minimizing the impact of a discriminatory act; whitewashing events by minimizing the impact of Blacks and other minorities; and highlighting one Black person in a White setting or event as a token

character. These distortions inaccurately portray United States history by minimizing Black culture and history. Historical perspectives of Black history are distorted to use non-controversial language in order to not offend anyone, as well as by reducing Black heroes and icons into one dimensional characters that serve to reinforce these noncontroversial stories. The focus in graphic violent sections was on using justification to defend violence, such as in the example, “But losing slaves meant losing money, so the ships’ captains tried to keep them alive. They whipped slaves who refused to eat and forced their jaws open or burned their lips with coals” (as cited in Brown and Brown, 2010). This section does show premeditated violence, but it fails to show the violence as anything other than the byproduct of the industry for enslaving people. In fact, it does not take into account the systematic and international importance placed on breaking enslaved Blacks. Brown and Brown found that many passages on enslavement categorized the cruelty as being dependent on an individual, the enslaver, rather than being a form of widespread systematic oppression (2010).

Adding on to the distortion of history, the omission of historical events is another way that textbooks inaccurately portray Blacks and other minorities (Wirtenberg, Murez, and Alspektor, 1980). Enslaved people riots are minimized or not mentioned for the most part in lots of textbooks, such as with the Igbo Landing enslavement revolt, in which a massive number of Igbo people committed mass suicide after taking control of the ship from White enslavers and walking into a creek or marsh depending on the account of the story; this event is symbolically important in both Black folklore and literary history, yet is absent from many textbooks. In many textbooks,

Martin Luther King Jr. is mentioned, yet he is portrayed for his famous speech and not the acts he did, such as protecting a pregnant White woman during a protest that got out of hand. By omitted these crucial pieces of Black history, textbooks do a disservice to Black culture by erasing the past from the current educational system and continuing the concept of segregating races, instead of demonstrating other scenarios. In Texas two years ago, there was outrage from concerned parents after McGraw-Hill, one of the three main publishing companies in the United States, referred to enslaved people as “workers” and neglected to mention enslavement at all except in the term “Atlantic Slave Trade” when talking about great migrations. While McGraw-Hill issued a digital update to the textbook, the physical ones will be used in Texas classrooms for at least another 10 years until the next updated version of the textbook (Fernandez and Hauser, 2015).

Furthermore, there is criticism in the field about several other objectionable patterns seen in the portrayals of Blacks. One such pattern is the romanticism of Blacks; one of the research groups in a study on bias in 1970s textbooks found that “... books about blacks frequently convey a romantic impression that camouflages reality” (Wirtenberg, Murez, and Alspektor, 1980). This team found an example of Frederick Douglass, in which they noted that textbooks “emphasized the gentility of Douglass’s master and ignored the inhumanity of slavery... [by] frequently showing blacks in idyllic, pastoral settings.” The romanticism of the texts draws attention away from the disturbing problems with enslavement and make it seem as if enslavement was not all

“that bad.” Romanticism washes away the brutality of slavery and hides it to become something that is easier for contesters of the horror to swallow.

#### Examples of Racist, Misleading, and Problematic Language in Textbooks

Racist language, including quotations, appear to be a prevalent structure in all three of the textbooks. The language on enslavement comes across as inadequate and poorly structured for inclusion of all races and genders. There were many examples of dehumanization, romanticism, and otherwise problematic language found. The first of which is the use of the word “slave.” This word dehumanizes enslaved people by referring to them as something other than human. “Enslaved people” is the correct term that many experts agree on as a better moniker, as it reinforces the fact that these are in fact people in a certain condition and not something inhuman.

#### **Prentice Hall**

Starting with the first textbook, one by Prentice Hall, one of the first quotes with perceived racism, is “Slave traders branded their cargo with hot irons, placed them in shackles, and jammed them into dark holds so crowded that the slaves could hardly move” (Lapsansky-Wener, 2014, p. 69-70). This quote uses dehumanization, or the reduction of humans, to describe something inanimate or animalistic. In this quote, enslaved people are called “cargo,” and aren’t referred to as people, and are instead just “slaves.” To reduce the position of people to just being capital and not acknowledging that they are in fact humans in an unbelievably tough situation is a prime example of dehumanization. There is no mention of the infection and pain that the



humans suffered from during this treatment. The humanizing language was never included, or was purposefully omitted.

Another highly problematic quote is found in Prentice Hall's textbook. The quote reads, "During the 1780s, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and George Washington hoped that slavery would gradually fade away" (Lapsansky-Wener, 2014, p. 236). This quote is a misleading one. It is the only quote that mentions Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and George Washington's opinions on enslavement, and unfortunately it disregards a very accurate statement: all of these men, part of the founding fathers of the United States, owned slaves. Some of these three owned them in the hundreds. This ignores the uncomfortable truth that this country relied heavily on slavery and enslavement practices in its formation and that some people who sought to limit slavery, in fact owned enslaved people themselves. This is not to say that the statement from the Prentice Hall textbook is inaccurate, as they might have eventually hoped enslavement would fade out, it just hides and omits the facts that these presidents benefited from slavery and would not be hard pressed to enact any action to end slavery.

One of the last problematic mention found in the Prentice Hall published textbook is the quotes surrounding Denmark Vesey. Denmark Vesey was a highly influential freedman in Charleston, South Carolina who was accused of leading a revolt of enslaved people (Lapsansky-Wener, 2014, p. 247). The textbook neglects to state how in his trial, Vesey was denied the right to confront his accusers or hear the testimonies they made against him. Furthermore, it doesn't mention the divide in punishment, as

Vesey was executed for his alleged role in the revolt, but White co-conspirators were simply fined. This is important to include in a textbook because it highlights some of the fundamental rights denied to Blacks, even freed ones, and the racism that was prevalent in the United States and continues to be a problem.

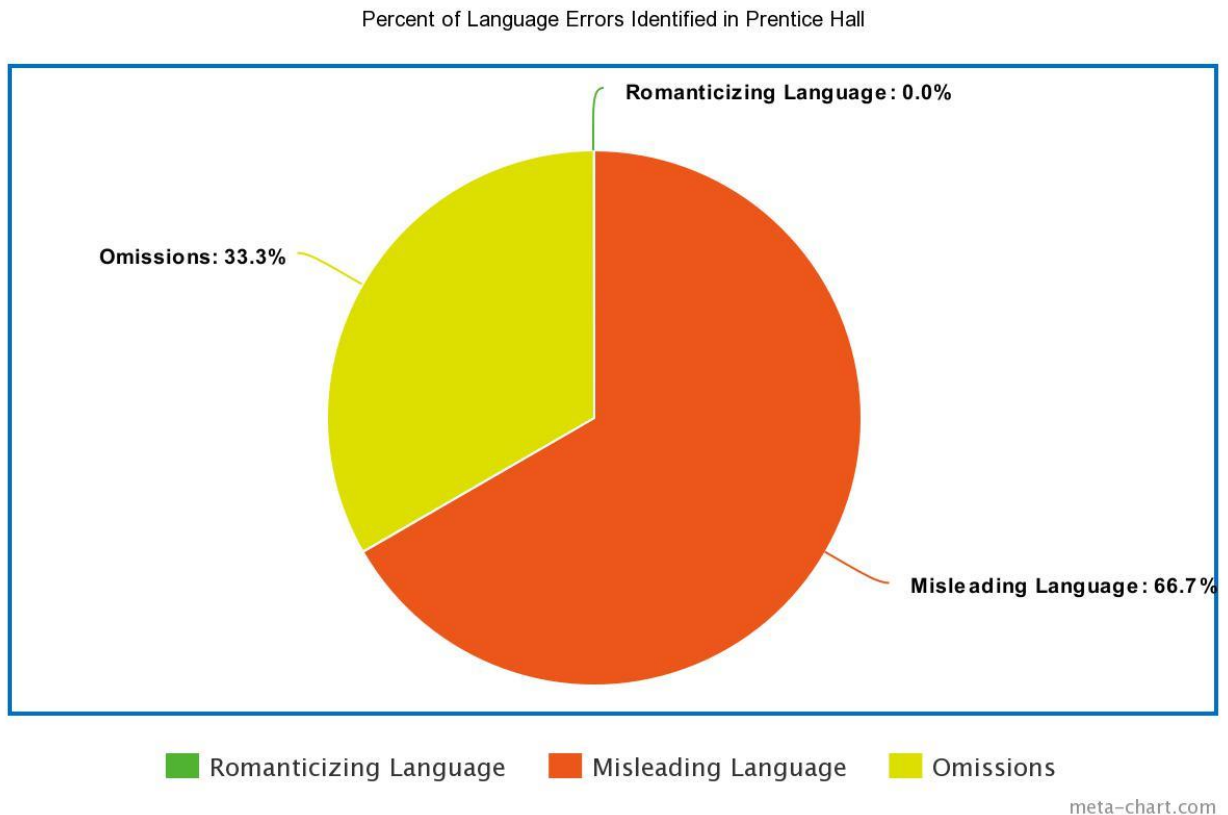


Figure 1. An infograph on the types of racist language present in the textbook. While the figure was made by me, Hevin Robertson, the quotes examined were taken from Lapsansky-Werner, E. J. (2014). *Prentice Hall United States history: Beginnings to the industrial revolution*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

### McDougal Littell

The next problematic quote was found in the textbook published by McDougal Littell, which has a number of troubling quotes when compared to the Prentice Hall

ones: "... they [the Portuguese] established large sugar plantations there [Principe and Sao Tome]. A plantation is a farm on which a single crop, usually one that requires much human labor, is grown on a large scale. To work these plantations, the Portuguese began importing slaves from the West African mainland" (p.17). This is all that is mentioned on sugar plantations, which had extremely high death rates from the brutal labor practices that occurred. This quote omits hard facts that better explain why enslaved people were chosen for this hard and short life, as they were not seen as worthy of living as Europeans or Whites and were often stereotyped as being taller, stronger, and faster than their European counterparts and therefore were "suited" for this line of treatment.

As the passage went on in the textbook by McDougal Littell, another troubling quote was found. "Because slave merchants tore apart many African families, slaves created new families among the people with whom they lived" (Danzer and McDougal Littell, 2006, p. 77). This sentence appears to be a kind one, showing the adaptability of enslaved people and highlighting the cruelty of the enslavers, but it ignores that family cannot be replaced; these enslaved people were not creating new families so much as they tried to soothe their terror of maybe never seeing their biological relatives again by bonding with someone in a similar position. This passage romanticizes losing families as making it seem as if the enslaved people just replaced their family and forgot about them, while many enslaved people tried to run away to return to or to find their family. These excerpts do not need to be included in the textbook and just take away from the inhumanity of enslaving people.

The textbook by McDougal Littell continues to be problematic through the next quote, which states, “This [reliance on enslavement practices] was not the case in the Northern colonies, due mainly to an economy driven by commerce rather than slavery” (Danzer and McDougal Littell, 2006, p. 78). This ignores that the North did benefit through enslavement practices, such as textile factories in the North relied on Enslaved people-picked cotton from the plantations, and other such manufacturing plants. In the North there were a number of enslaved people as well, though they mainly worked in domestic fields as opposed to plantations, as those were mainly in the South. Northern states manufactured the ships that brought enslaved people into the United States, which didn’t end until 1808, despite the illegal entry of slave ships that continued throughout most of the century, including in the 1860s a ship named the *Clotilda* (Gibbons, 2018). This is furthermore stated in another quote, “By the late 1700s, slavery in the North was dying out. Farmers had little economic motivation to use slaves, and an increasing number of Northerners began to voice their religious and political opposition to slavery” (Danzer and McDougal Littell, 2006, p. 215). This again ignores that Northerners did benefit off the practice of enslavement, and that abolition was not a popular movement until the 1800s.

The next quote from McDougal Littell concerns the New York Conspiracy of 1741, which was a supposed enslaved people-led rebellion that burned down houses and buildings in New York City to allegedly take over the city. The book only states, “They [New Yorkers] decided to make an example of the suspected ringleaders, burning alive 13 persons and hanging 18” (Danzer and McDougal Littell, 2006, p. 82). However,

the book doesn't clearly state that the event was inspired by fear and there was no proof that the event was led by anyone; it was just based on classist and racist-inspired fear that rich White people had during the time, which led to the persecution of 31 people, with no clear plot discovered, as found in the Encyclopedia of Britannica article, "New York Slave Rebellion of 1741" (n.d.).

When it comes to enslaved Blacks and warfare, the textbook continues to omit key information. McDougal Littell's textbook states, "About 5,000 African Americans served in the Continental Army, where their courage, loyalty, and talent impressed white Americans" (Danzer and McDougal Littell, 2006, P. 122). This ignores the prejudice, horrible conditions, and discrimination or racism faced by the courageous Blacks who fought. Under some leaders like George Washington, enslaved people were treated very equitably with the White troops and were intermixed with them. However, some enslaved people were forced to fight in place for their White owners (Dobyns, 2007).

The next quote found in the McDougal Littell textbook is similar to an earlier problematic quote about the founding fathers, as it states, "In his first draft [of the Declaration of Independence], Jefferson included an eloquent attack on the cruelty and injustice of the slave trade" (Danzer and McDougal Littell, 2006, p. 106). While Thomas Jefferson might have been against the horrors of the transportation of the kidnapped and enslaved people of Africa, he was the owner of enslaved people himself and propagated the trade. In his first draft of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson was more so blaming the horrors on Great Britain and the king at the time, than he was

saying enslavement was a horrible practice to be abolished (Olwell, n.d.). According to written accounts, Jefferson believed that Africans and Whites could not live peacefully in the same country, and that after emancipation, formerly enslaved people would need to be removed from the country and transported elsewhere, according to the Thomas Jefferson Encyclopedia at Monticello. Over the course of his life, Jefferson owned over 600 enslaved people, though he advocated a more “peaceful” way of managing over his enslaved workers. Still, he treated them better than most enslaved people owners and taught them trades and such, but he was a perpetuator of the system of enslavement. He wanted his enslaved people to function like machines, from the amount of capital they produced for him to the frequency of children women bore (“Thomas Jefferson's Attitudes Toward Slavery,” n.d.). Furthermore, Jefferson allegedly took advantage of some enslaved females, such as Sally Hemings, who is not mentioned in the textbook at all.

Another poorly phrased quote from McDougal Littell states, “Representation based on population raised the question of whether slaves should be counted as people.” (Danzer and McDougal Littell, 2006, p. 142). Again, while an accurate statement, as the purpose of the famed Three-Fifths Compromise was to settle this issue, this sentence makes it sound like enslaved people aren’t worthy of being called people. Textbooks ignore definitive statements about enslavement, despite the obvious cruelty in the practice, but to ignore the practice and place no judgment on enslavers as we would with historical villains like the Nazis — or even the current (yet changing) framework of dehumanizing the Mongol warriors — is a disservice to students as they

are taught that enslavement is not something to pass judgment on. We need to be critical of our history so we learn from it, and passively teaching some of our nation's greatest mistakes is a tragedy.

Another slightly problematic quote is one of the few concerning Nat Turner's rebellion in Virginia in 1831. The McDougal Littell published textbook proclaims, "Turner's bloody rebellion strengthened the resolve of Southern whites to defend slavery and to control their slaves" (Danzer and McDougal Littell, 2006, p. 252). This is phrased a little poorly, in that it omits just what this entailed. Turner, along with his co-conspirators, killed about 51 Whites and 55 to 65 people in total, as published in the History Channel biographical article "Nat Turner" (2009). Turner and his co-conspirators were hanged for the deaths, but the textbook neglects to mention that while new laws were passed limiting more rights of enslaved people, but that hundreds of enslaved people unaffiliated with the rebellion were brutally murdered or beat to death as a sort of revenge by angry Whites. Again, this is important to state in the textbook facts like this that show the prejudice, victim-blaming, and hate crimes associated with life at this time in history for students to understand the magnitude of the situation that people were in. Enslavement was not simply a person working long hours, but having their whole lives controlled from what they wore and ate, to who they married, and when they had children. Informing students of what punishments were faced by enslaved people sheds some light on the terror of enslavement, where a person could be punished, beaten, or killed simply for having different colored skin.

The last problematic quotes from McDougal Littell showcases grievous errors made with wording. The first part of the quote begins, “In the years before the Civil War, most workers labored from dawn to dusk ...” (Danzer and McDougal Littell, 2006, p. 266). The passage specifically identifies the workers as being enslaved people, and does identify that this is a form of exploitation, as the textbook also mentions that enslaved children began working fields full time at the young age of ten. However, the textbook still calls enslaved people workers, without the prefix of using the word enslaved. Merely saying “workers” sounds like this was something faced by everyone, and not simply a problem with exploiting enslaved people who could not legally defend themselves or protest their situation without threat of harm. The second quote reads, “No other antebellum workers had such harsh, brutal treatment imposed on them” (Danzer and McDougal Littell, 2006, p. 266). This quote is problematic mainly because of the use of the word, “worker” instead of enslaved person. The word “workers” implies a job, and a job implies wages. The word is mistakenly used and is not, and cannot, be a synonym for the word enslavement.



Percent of Language Errors Identified in McDougal Littell

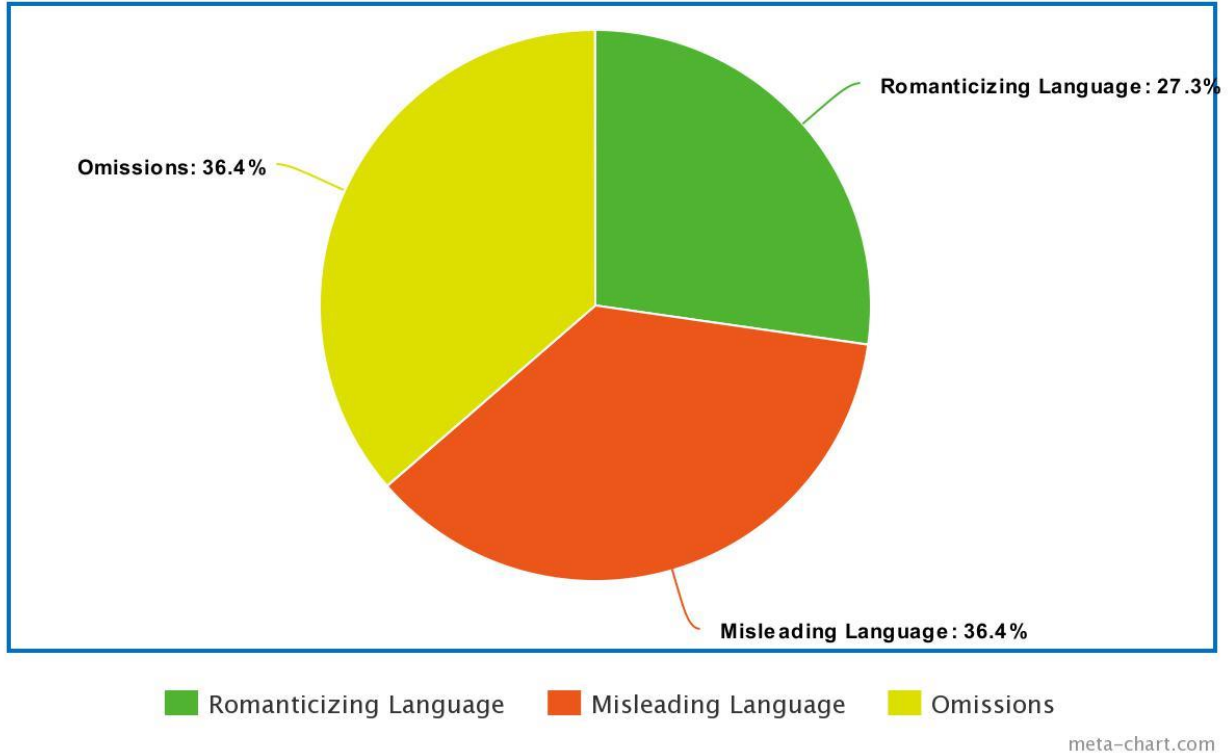


Figure 2. An infographic on the types of racist language present in the textbook. While the figure was made by me, Hevin Robertson, the quotes examined were taken from Holt McDougal Education. (2006). *The Americans*. Evanston, IL: McDougal Littell.

### McGraw Hill

Similar to an earlier McDougal Littell quote, the first quote from McGraw Hill reads, “Because Southern planters relied on enslaved workers to plant and pick their cotton, the demand for slave labor increased” (McGraw Hill Education, 2011, p. 388). Again, like in the earlier paragraph where I discussed the other textbook’s similar quotation, this passage misrepresents enslavement through diction; the use of the word workers, instead of simply replacing that word with “people,” distorts the facts by romanticizing the forced labor inflicted on hundreds of thousands of people just in America. It was not “work” because work implies wages or some sort of personal gain

from the act of laboring. Furthermore, the insistence of textbooks to refer to enslavers as “planters” makes them sound benign and like they actually do any part of the manual labor; they are not planting anything, and are relying on human trafficking to keep their fields afloat.

Continuing with the trend of textbooks belittling and romanticizing the experience of enslaved peoples, the first quotation from McGraw Hill states, “Planters would have had to sell enslaved people or land to raise the money to build factories,” as justification to why the South relied so heavily on agriculture (McGraw Hill Education, 2011, p. 389). Again, it continues with the disgusting trend of labelling enslavers as “planters,” and ignores that the South was a perfect economy for agriculture, and still is, while the Northern landscape is better suited for factories and industrial processes as there is more people to support that economy, and the ground is less pliant and fertile than in the South. The South was one of the main providers of food, grain, and cotton for the country due to its temperate climate, and there was no reason for it to have many factories outside of this agricultural sector. Furthermore, this acts like the only reason the South was not reliant on industry instead of agriculture is a reluctance to give up enslaved people or land, and ignores the deep-set practice on relying on other to do all the hard work for you, as enslavement had. These enslavers didn’t want to give up the practice cultivated since before the South had even began.

The next troubling quote is by McGraw Hill, which states, “In the North, however, it [enslavement] was not a major source of labor. People in that region began working to end slavery in America” (McGraw Hill Education, 2011, p. 185). Like a

previous quote by McDougal Littell, this is a misleading quotation because it ignores the reliance on textile factories to enslaved-picked cotton and other such professions that relied in part on products that were made by exploited people, and furthermore ignores that not all Northern people were against enslavement, and that the movement did not pick up major popularity until the 1800s.

The next few quotes all center around the rationale for enslavement being such a large part of the Southern economy and the passages lack decency in providing an accurate representation of the truth without loose justification or romanticization of the facts. The first quotation reads, “Slavery was at the heart of the Southern economy, but that did not mean that every white person owned large numbers of enslaved people” (McGraw Hill Education, 2011, p. 391). First, it skews the data because single people rarely owned enslaved people; families as a whole would own other humans, while the head of household would take the burden of being labelled the “slaveholder” of the family despite the whole family benefitting from the usage. The 1860 Census is unfortunately the best way to estimate the amount of human traffickers in the country at any given point, which is a challenging source because by that time many former states that supported enslavement had turned to a more rational mindset and banned the owning of people like cattle. At this so called “peak” in human enslavement, when looking at all households, it is clear that nearly a quarter of households owned humans (Goodheart, 2012). While that is not every person or every household, it is a significant enough number that should not be obscured through the “not all White people were like that” mentality that is prevalent in modern textbooks nowadays. Again, this is

comparably to how we do not stress that not all Nazis hated or wanted to kill Jews in textbooks; an atrocity should not be downsized simply because a few people are uncomfortable with their deeply held racist beliefs stemming in pride from a short-lived White Supremacist country. A significant number of the population owned people, and an even greater number wished they were wealthy enough to own people, and that is the truth that should be written in textbooks, not a over simplified version that omits hard facts.

McGraw Hill has an odd way of phrasing things, in a way that is uncomfortably problematic. A quote from them reads, “Other defenses of slavery were based on racism” (McGraw Hill Education, 2011, p. 414). This quotation makes it seem like enslavement was not a racist practice; all reasons for maintaining it and continuing it are racist simply because enslaving people on the basis of their skin color or country of origin *is* racist. Sure, defenses of enslavement could focus on arguing it is beneficial in an economic or status quo maintaining sort of way, but that does not make the defense any less rooted in some way on racism. If, in an economic defense, they argued that *all* people should have the potential to be enslaved, then it would not be racist, but all the prevalent economic defenses of enslavement continued with the idea to enslave *Black* peoples — and Black peoples *only* — for economic benefits or to prevent wide destabilization of state economies.

In the sections on the Civil War, the only mention of African Americans fighting in the McGraw Hill textbook states, “The Union refused at first to let free African Americans enlist, Union leaders worried that white troops would not accept African

American soldiers” (McGraw Hill Education, 2011, p. 455). This ignores the reality of systematic racist laws existing that limited Blacks from fighting, such as a law passed in 1792 that barred Blacks from enlisting in the U.S. Army (Freeman et al, 1999). Eventually, declining White volunteering prompted officials to rectify these racist bans, which led to regiments of Black soldiers. However, these units and regiments were kept separate from White units and saw less battles than their White peers due to discrimination and lasting racial prejudice from superior officers to the troops; it was not like the White superior officers were more accepting of Black soldiers as the quotation from the textbook implies.

One of the most glaring omissions in this textbook by McGraw Hill is the lack of promotion of Black heroes. Harriet Tubman gets few mentions in the whole textbook and the only one found was simply, “Harriet Tubman was the most famous conductor [of the Underground Railroad]” (McGraw Hill Education, 2011, p. 412). She is the most famous conductor in the Underground Railroad, that again, may be a true statement, but it ignores how much her life was shaped by enslavement and how she fought desperately and cunningly to get other people out. Tubman was born into enslavement, and she was injured and impaired for the rest of her life from trying to intervene between an enslaver and a person he was punishing. She most likely ended up using the Underground Railroad herself when she ran to freedom, and she did return later as a conductor to free her family and others. She was so successful she was dubbed “Moses” and a large reward for her capture was offered. Furthermore, she helped find supporters for John Brown in his Harpers’ Ferry rebellion. Later, she was even a scout

for the Union in the Civil War, and her intel led to successes in battles against the Confederacy (Michals, 2015). She was an amazing woman, who should be celebrated for far more than just her success with the Underground Railroad.

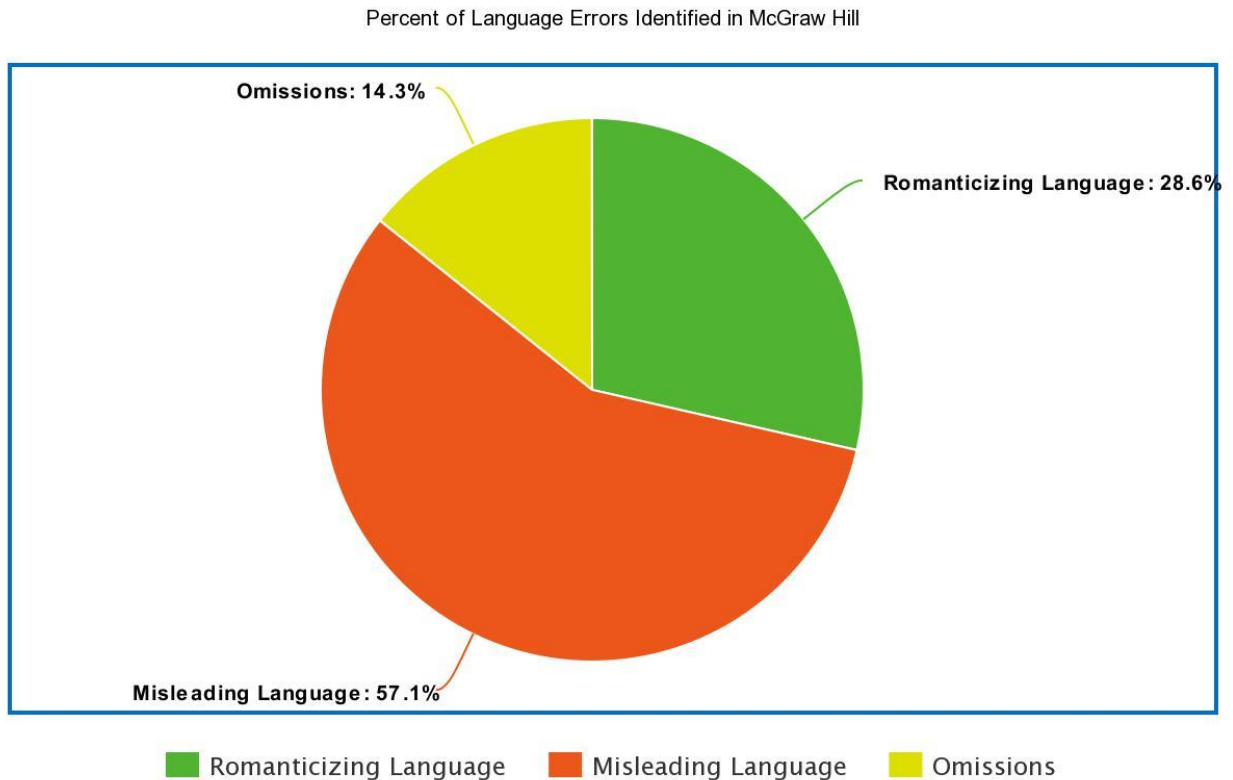


Figure 3. An infographic on the types of racist language present in the textbook. While the figure was made by me, Hevin Robertson, the quotes examined were taken from *Discovering Our Past A History of the United States*. (2011). Macmillan/McGraw-Hill School Div.

### All Textbooks

The next quote was found in all three of the textbooks. It looks nearly identical for the Prentice Hall textbook and the McDougal Littell textbook. The first, Prentice Hall's, states: "They [enslaved Blacks] stayed on the plantations, but they resisted by working slowly, feigning illness, pretending ignorance, or breaking tools (Lapsansky-

Wener, 2014, p.71).” While, McDougal Littell’s textbook has, “Throughout the colonies, planters reported slaves faking illness, breaking tools, and staging work slowdowns.” (Danzer and McDougal Littell, 2006, p. 78). Finally, the McGraw Hill textbook reads, “Armed revolts such as Turner’s were rare because enslaved African Americans realized they had little chance of winning. For the most part, enslaved people resisted slavery by working slowly or by pretending to be ill. Sometimes, they might set fire to a plantation building or break tools” (McGraw Hill Education, 2011, p. 396). This ignores the amount of enslaved people who had to work while injured or sick because they were seen as a product or commodity rather than as a human being. Furthermore, enslaved people worked up to fourteen hours on their plantations, and as such might not be staging “slowdowns” so much as they were tired and overworked and needed a rest, or even conserving energy to work such a long day. Both of these passages characterize enslaved people as sneaky and as being liars for personal gain, and neither textbook provided further explanation to dispel this portrayal as anything other than the complaints of human traffickers. The last problem with these statements is that enslavers are referred to as “planters,” a rather gentle and mild term, and that the textbooks use them as a credible source that enslaved people weren’t just sick or working with cheap tools.

The next three excerpts, one from each textbook, have to do with enslaved people attempting to escape enslavement. The first quote from Prentice Hall states, “Spanish welcomed them [runaway enslaved Blacks] with food, land, and freedom. The Spanish sought to weaken the British colonies and to strengthen their own frontier

militia with freed African Americans” (Lapsansky-Wener, 2014, P.71). While this statement is true, Spanish colonies did welcome Blacks with open arms and freed them from enslavement, though it does not mention this is only if the enslaved people threw away their religion and became Roman Catholics. Enslaved people found better refuge with the Seminole Native Americans in Florida, as they wanted nothing in return for what they offered runaway enslaved people. However, this is omitted from the textbooks. The second quote, from McDougal Littell, is even more troubling: “Despite the severe punishment that escape attempts brought, a number of slaves tried to run away” (Danzer and McDougal Littell, 2006, p. 78). This quote implies that enslaved Blacks were not intelligent for continuing to try and escape from a life of harsh bondage, as they more often than not were caught and punished. This quote has a negative connotation towards attempted escapes, when it should hold a more heroic tone for the people who risked everything, including their life, for a chance of freedom, which is more aligned with the “American dream” than submitting to an enslaver who beats, starves, and forces them to work an obscene amount of time without pay. Finally, the last quote on escape is from the McGraw Hill textbook: “Often their [enslaved people’s] goal was to find relatives on other plantations. Sometimes they left to escape punishment” (McGraw Hill Education, 2011, p. 396). This quote is only troubling because of the omissions; enslaved people left for hundreds of reasons and most of it had to do with their treatment. To ignore the cruel way enslaved folks were treated as the main reason for people to attempt escapes is a violent misleading statement. While the mention of enslaved people leaving to find relatives is a kind statement and a true one,



the amount of people leaving because they simply wanted to be free somewhere without harsh punishments romanticizes the first half of the statement. The latter half of the statement is derogatory, implying that enslaved people often ran because they were in trouble for something they did makes Blacks seem sneaky and unable to face their consequences; this is not the case. More often enslaved people ran out of fear for their lives, as they were at the mercy of another person's whims, which is a reason that should be mentioned far above that of a bias or identify that it is a negatively connotation statement.

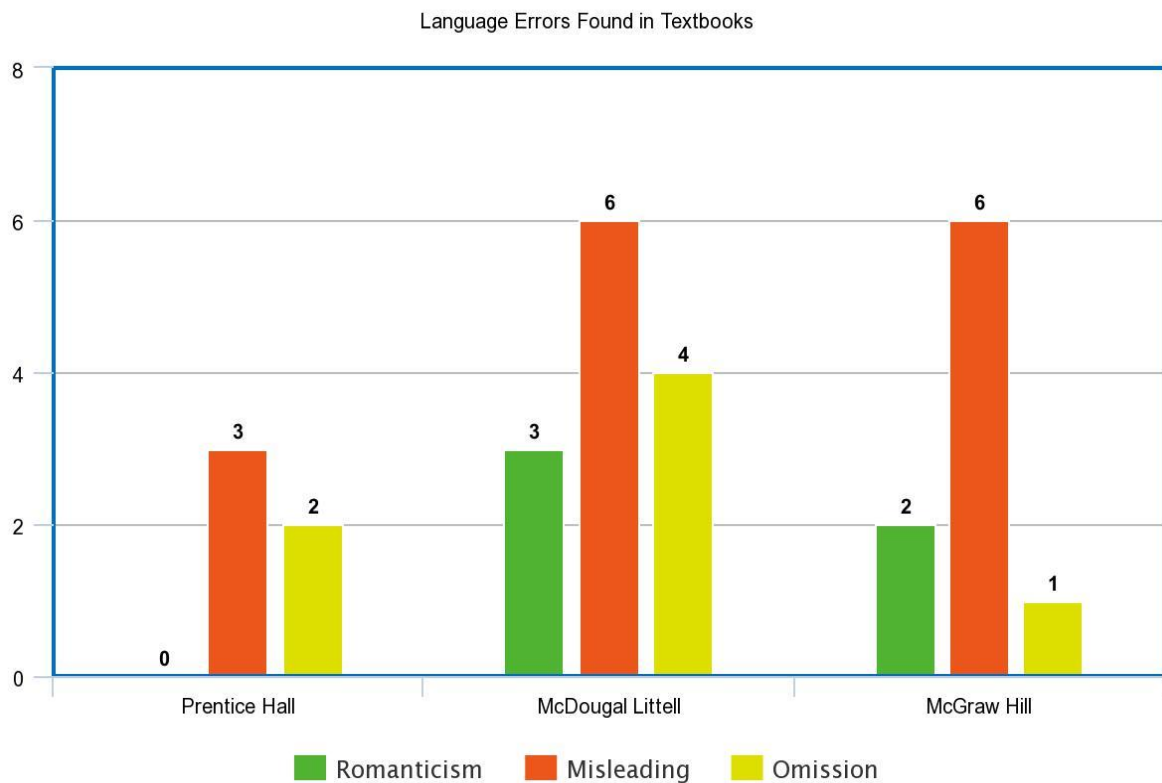


Figure 4. An infographic on the types of racist language present in all of the textbooks. While the figure was made by me, Hevin Robertson, the quotes examined were taken from Lapsansky-Werner, E. J. (2014). *Prentice Hall United States history: Beginnings to the industrial revolution*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.;

Education. (2006). *The Americans*. Evanston, IL: McDougal Littell.; and *Discovering Our Past: a History of the United States*. (2011). Macmillan/McGraw-Hill School Div.

### **Omissions**

While it is necessary to understand the limitations in the scope of what a textbook can cover, some culturally relevant material should be included in the textbook to impact cultural awareness. Due to the minimization of Black history in textbooks, it is incredibly important to discuss cultural events and Black historical figures in order to fully impress on students the multicultural and multiethnic history of the United States, which has always been so, even since before White settlers came to the continent. None of the following omissions need to be explained in great detail, but they should be mentioned in a relevant section of the text or put in a blurb on the top or side of the page at the least.

The first big omission found in a majority of the textbooks, was the absence of the first recorded enslaved people revolt. This revolt occurred in the British colonies in 1663, when White indentured servants banded together with Black slaves to try and gain their freedom in Gloucester, Virginia. Ultimately, the revolt failed, but the racial impact was powerful. Not wanting Whites and Blacks to band together, enslavers and landowners decided to create a power divide between the two races, promoting White indentured servants into roles of overseers and allowing them to join militias (Jealous, 2013). This power divide ultimately continued into other Southern colonies and eventually indentured servitude was all but replaced by enslavement, which moved into being on the basis of skin color and ethnicity. According to Schmidt (2005), "If stories of resistance are absent from classrooms, students may feel powerless to act against

racism.” Learning about rebellions, revolts, and acts of resistance lead to students better understand their ability to fight for change and being more active in voicing concerns against inequalities and oppression.

The second important omission from most of the textbooks is Crispus Attucks. He was a former slave, born around 1723. He ran away from his enslaver when he was in his twenties, and found work mainly as a sailor. Increasingly annoyed by British soldiers taking jobs for less pay, Attucks and a group of around thirty men began taunting a British guard. Eventually, seven redcoats showed up at the scene and escalated the violence, killing Attucks and four others in what is now known as the Boston Massacre. Due to this being one of the events at the start of the American Revolution, Crispus Attucks, a runaway enslaved Black, is credited as the first casualty of the American Revolution (“Crispus Attucks”, n.d.). While it is still unclear whether people should celebrate Attucks as a patriot, or decry him a villain, he is important to learn about due to his death being one of the main beginning points of the American Revolution, and as his status as a Black formerly enslaved person who could be represented as a hero and model for students as someone who stood up for himself and fought and died for what he believed in.

In textbooks, there is a disturbingly few amount of rebellions covered, with Nat Turner’s being the one that tends to get the most coverage. However, there are a lot of very impactful rebellions that deserve more than a sentence blurb and do deserve to be explained in a few quick sentences in a textbook. The Stono Rebellion is one such event. Occurring in 1739, the Stono Rebellion took place when around twenty enslaved people

decided to turn against the people who enslaved them. They raided a store, stole weapons, and marched around town demanding their freedom. They recruited more enslaved people along the way — some allegedly being forced to join — and unfortunately did kill in their quest for liberty. Ultimately, the enslaved people were attacked by White settlers, who killed a number of them and sold the rest of the enslaved people off to the West Indies in punishment. This event is important because it sparked a tightening in the control and domination of Black lives in the South and the passing of laws to restrict enslaved people from making money or even learning how to read (Sutherland, n.d.).

A neglected figure of importance in history is Gabriel Prosser, who lived from 1776 to 1800. Prosser was a literate enslaved person whose true last name is unknown, though history has given him the last name of his enslaver. He was very skilled in tasks such as blacksmithing, and as such worked in a variety of places with a status and treatment that was perceived as being higher than other enslaved people under the enslaver Thomas Prosser. Gabriel Prosser, inspired by the American Revolution, along with a group of other artisans, decided to have their own revolution to create a more democratic society in Virginia. Before the revolution could take place, a storm stalled the beginning, and someone in the group betrayed Prosser and told the plans to White authority figures. Even though no Whites were injured because the revolt never took place, Prosser, along with twenty-seven Black co-conspirators were executed. Like the previous mentioned rebellion, this one — christened Gabriel's Rebellion — led to a tightening laws against Blacks and enslaved people. This event is incredibly important to

show the resistance of Blacks in early America to enslavement, and further shows a legacy and inspiration from the American Revolution that isn't often taught. Furthermore, in the trial, one of Prosser's co-conspirators said the following inspirational quote that would be very powerful to share in a classroom to show the willingness of enslaved people to be martyrs and end their lives so that other may be free in a truly American way: "I have nothing more to offer than what General Washington would have had to offer, had he been taken by the British and put to trial by them. I have adventured my life in endeavoring to obtain the liberty of my countrymen, and am a willing sacrifice in their cause" ("Gabriel's Rebellion: Another View of Virginia in 1800," n.d.).

A significant event not mentioned in any of the textbooks is the culturally important Igbo Landing event of 1803. The Igbo Landing occurred when a ship arrived in Georgia, carrying captives from Igbo, which was a tribe in present day Nigeria. The enslaved people, fearing the horrors they would go through, had revolted on the ship and took it over from the White human traffickers. As written by Roswell King, what happened once the enslaved people reached shore was as follows: singing, the high chief of the Igbo people led his followers off the ship and into the marsh (Momodu, n.d.). The mass suicide of the Igbo people reveals the reluctance of humans to be captives of others, and the power of resistance. This event has been monumentally impactful on Black culture, and has been alluded to in Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison's novel, *Song of Solomon*; Alex Haley's critically acclaimed novel *Roots*; Paule

Marshall's novel *Praisesong for the Widow*; the feature film *Daughters of the Dust*; and a scene in the music video for "Love Drought" by Beyoncé.

Another near forgotten rebellion is one that occurred in 1811, in an area dubbed the "German Coast" for its numerous German inhabitants in Louisiana territory. The rebellion occurred when an enslaved man named Charles Deslondes, the son of a Black Haitian woman and her White enslaver — along with potentially eleven other leaders — killed an enslaver and his son on their plantation (Fessenden, 2016). According to historians, the rebellion had been in the works for a few years, and the total number of revolutionaries are estimated to be between two hundred and five hundred enslaved people. The rebellion was inspired by Haiti's successful revolution, and some sources state that some of the rebelling enslaved people in the German Coast Uprising had copies of the *French Declaration of the Rights of Man* in their quarters, and used it as inspiration (Bacon-Blood, 2011). The rebellion was nearly successful, but was ultimately quashed by federal troops (Fessenden, 2016). It was the largest enslaved rebellion in the United States territory, and as such it is important to remember it. Furthermore, the rebellion was nearly successful, which would have dramatically altered the course of history.

Another key influential figure omitted largely from textbooks is Solomon Northup. Northup was born a free Black man from a freed father and never-enslaved mother in New York. He worked seasonal jobs, but eventually became known as a violinist, and was talked into going to perform in Washington, D.C. Unfortunately, he didn't tell his wife, and left his free papers at home. The men, Merrill Brown and Abram

Hamilton, drugged Northup, kidnapped him, and stripped him of any identifying papers. Northup was sold into slavery, and remained enslaved until a Canadian man helped get word to Northup's family. Northup wrote a book describing what he endured, and became involved in the abolitionist movement. Little is discussed of Northup in textbooks, despite his life being a chronicle of the terror that even freed Black people faced during that time in a racist country. Furthermore, his life shows the disregard for Blacks as Northup tried to convict the men who kidnapped him, but unfortunately could not because Washington D.C. did not allow Blacks to testify against Whites (Mack, n.d.). This racial injustice is a good example of how the country operated at the time and is a necessary example for students to learn.

The last important thing that I have determined is missing from textbooks is the Creole Case of 1841. This event occurred mainly on the enslavement vessel christened the *Creole*. In 1841, enslaved people on the ship which was intended for arrival in Louisiana rose up and mutinied against the crew and killed one of the traders. They allowed an overseer to navigate for them, and the group decided to sail for the British-held West Indies to get their freedom as some of the rebels have heard of the British granting other mutineers freedom. The British officials in the Bahamas pronounced the enslaved people free, but jailed the rebels suspected of murder. Three enslaved women and two children decided to return to the United States with the crew. This event is the only successful enslaved people revolt that took place concerning the United States, with the revolt taking place on a United States ship with enslaved people being transported from Virginia to Louisiana (Momodu, n.d.). This event is incredibly

important to mention in textbooks because it is the only successful enslaved-led revolt that actually succeeded in United States' history. Furthermore, it provides context that other countries did not support the United States continued reliance on enslavement, and the efforts people would go to be freed from bondage.

### Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to concretely find examples of racism, but the thesis was expanded to include misleading and problematic language after finding some examples that could be perceived as racist, but weren't concretely and definitively racist. Drawing on evidence presented in this thesis, the three textbooks have numerous examples of racist, problematic, and misleading information, while also being guilty of missing historical facts to further contextualize an event or person. All of which negatively impacts students by altering key events in United States history and distorting the historical lens of enslavement. Some of the biggest offenses are: the use of language like "slaves" or "cargo" which is dehumanizing and ignores the fact that people who are enslaved are still human; the omission of contextualizing facts, such as the mistreatment of Blacks as compared to Whites in the aftermaths of rebellions; and the misleading language found, such as some of the founding fathers being labeled as or likened to abolitionists when they in fact owned up to hundreds of enslaved people themselves.

This thesis identifies problems with the wording in textbooks concerning Blacks in the colonies into the United States, and should be used as a guide to further the research into more publications, editions, or authors. Research into this field is



expanding and has growing interest, but is still lacking definitive examples from modern textbooks with detailed explanations as to what the problem with the sentence contains and/or historical evidence and sources as backing. The aim of this thesis is to be used sort of as a model for other people interested in furthering this research, as it was inspired by others' hard work. Unfortunately, this delving into the issue is limited to only three textbooks, of various publishers, and could be benefitted from further research into more publications, or just the editions and various textbooks under each individual publication company.

During the creation of this thesis, I intentionally read passages seeking out racist, misleading, or problematic language and as such, acknowledge the potential for bias, which is why I deferred to others in defining what constitutes as any of the three aforementioned language types. Furthermore, I used historical knowledge found in books, reputable websites, and scholarly journals in order to back up my claims and explain in errors in language found in the textbooks. I presented these quotations from the textbooks along with studies that showed some evidence that language use can affect students negatively, especially if they do not identify as being a White male, of which modern day history centers around. The passages, information, and relevant evidence of this thesis should be used as a guide to eliminate cultural bias in modern textbooks. Education is the foundation of the freedoms this nation works hard to protect, therefore an inclusive education is necessary to protect all students, regardless of race, age, gender, sexual orientation or ability.

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