



Anti-Americanism and American Education
by
Dr. Sandra Alfonsi
Senior Academic Fellow, PJTN and TNT

The idea that today's American textbooks teach anti-Americanism to our students is in itself an anomaly. However, it is indeed what many textbooks do now and have done over the years. We must understand that it is not accomplished by frontal assault but rather by the use of superb innuendo, half-truths, omission of substantiating material and subtle acerbic attacks on America's ethics, intent and even military superiority. In tandem with the textbooks' anti-Americanism we have their denigration of American Exceptionalism – the special character of the United States as a uniquely free nation and Constitutional Republic, based on democratic ideals and personal liberty.

Pearson's United States History: Reconstruction to the Present, is a 10th grade textbook, published in 2018. It appears to be an excellent textbook – accurate, factual, apparently balanced, well-written and visually pleasing. Its questions will lead students to hone their critical thinking skills. That being said, a careful review of this book will reveal several skillful examples of veiled anti-Americanism. The danger of Pearson's anti-Americanism rests in the subtlety of its language and seemingly careful historical placement. The following three examples give a feeling for how anti-Americanism is introduced into our education. It is non-threatening but plants seeds of disrespect for America through disparaging language, improper comparisons that damage by association and connotation.

Page 117, ll.1-12

During the Age of Imperialism, from the mid-1880s through the early 1900s, powerful nations engaged in a mad dash to extend their influence across much of the world. European nations added to colonies they had established during the Age of Exploration by acquiring new colonies in Africa and Asia.

Following European success, Japan and the United States also began to consider the benefits of imperialism, the policy by which strong nations extend their political, military, and economic control over weaker territories. Although imperialism would prove an awkward fit for the United States, the nation's desire to take its place on the world stage spurred some territorial expansion and a larger increase in influence.

Merriam-Webster defines Imperialism as the policy, practice, or advocacy of extending the power and dominion of a nation, especially by direct territorial acquisitions or by gaining indirect control over the political or economic life of other areas. The linkage of Japan and the United States as imperialist nations is deleterious by association. Japan had been trying to

become an Empire since the 16th century when it began its invasion of Korea in 1592. This lasted until 1598. Japan followed the model of European imperialism and in 1868 the Empire of Japan was founded. Japan forcefully acquired three major foreign territories between 1894 and 1910: Taiwan in 1895 after the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95; Korea as a protectorate in 1905 after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, then as a colony when unilaterally annexed by Japan in 1910; and the Kwantung Leased Territories in 1905 in southern Manchuria, when Japan succeeded to Russia's leases after the Russo-Japanese War.¹ The United States voted to annex the Philippines after it was ceded to them by Spain at the end of the Spanish-American War. It has since become the Republic of the Philippines. The annexation of Hawaii was controversial in the U.S., not supported by the President and therefore implemented with difficulty. Hawaii has since become a state. The implications in the second paragraph are shaded but they are there: that the United States is as guilty of imperialism as is Japan and that its government is guided by a policy of expansionism and territorial conquest.

Page 118 ll. 59-71

Social Darwinists felt that certain nations and races were superior to others and therefore were destined to rule over inferior peoples and cultures. Some prominent Americans embraced these ideas and began to worry that if the United States remained isolated while European nations gobbled up the rest of the world, America would not survive.

One reason that these Americans embraced Social Darwinism was that they had long believed that God had granted them the right and responsibility to settle the frontier. They spoke of America's "Manifest Destiny" to extend all the way to the Pacific Ocean.

The linkage between Social Darwinism and Manifest Destiny in these two paragraphs is an example of anti-Americanism that is both biased and dangerous. It presents the message that American Exceptionalism came from and relied upon American superiority over "inferior peoples and cultures" and that in order to survive and compete with European nations, America also had to "gobble up" countries. Furthermore, it presents the concept of "Manifest Destiny" as an off-shoot of Social Darwinism and totally destroys the Judeo-Christian tradition upon which our country and Manifest Destiny were founded. The most influential ideology in our nation's history is Manifest Destiny. Its ideology dates itself back to colonialism when Americans believed they would be the example for the rest of the world. Americans believed they were destined by God to remake the world. This ideal of American Exceptionalism has fueled American expansion westward through the ideology of Manifest Destiny.²

Page 125 ll. 51-67 American Foreign Policy in Latin America

As the United States tentatively asserted its interests in East Asia, Americans called for a more aggressive role in Latin America. American entrepreneurs and government leaders wanted the region to be a sphere of influence from which other great powers were

¹ <http://wgordon.web.wesleyan.edu/papers/imperialism.htm>

² <http://wgordon.web.wesleyan.edu/papers/imperialism.htm>

excluded. American influence in Latin America brought obvious benefits to the United States, but it also contributed to anti-American hostility and instability in the region.

America's victory over Spain liberated the Puerto Rican and Cuban people from Spanish rule. But victory left the fates of these islands unresolved. Would Puerto Rico and Cuba become independent nations? Or would they become colonies of the United States?

These two paragraphs embody anti-Americanism and anti-American Exceptionalism. They are what make Pearson one of the most dangerous and agenda-based publishing houses today. The language is carefully skewed to show America in the role of the aggressor and imperialist. It puts the blame for anti-American hostility and regional instability directly on America with no regard for the historical realities that drew the United States into conflicts not of their making. However, it is the second paragraph that reveals Pearson's blatant disregard for American Exceptionalism as well as historical accuracy. America's victory over Spain did indeed free Puerto Rico and Cuba. Pearson's question about the status of Puerto Rico and Cuba – would they be independent nations or would the United States be the imperialist and aggressor? – are unnecessary since the history of these two countries has long been written. Rather than portray America in an accurate positive historical light, Pearson has chosen to plant the seeds of anti-Americanism by intimating that the United States is guilty of colonization, imperialism and aggression, even though knowing that this was not historically true.

Review written by Dr. Sandra Alfonsi at the behest of Adam Milstein