

# PATRIOTISM OVER DEMOCRACY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF U.S. HISTORY TEXTBOOKS

*In his critical analysis of 12 commonly used U.S. history textbooks, James Loewen found that they consistently misrepresented the role of the federal government in foreign and domestic policy. In doing so, he concludes, "American history textbooks minimize the potential power of the people and, despite their best patriotic efforts, take a stance that is overtly antidemocratic." He examines how textbooks describe U.S. foreign policy in response to international struggles for human rights and self-determination, and then looks at domestic policy with a focus on the federal government's role in the Civil Rights Movement.*

*By James W. Loewen*

**W**hat story do textbooks tell about our government? First, they imply that the state we live in today is the state created in 1789. Textbook authors overlook the possibility that the balance of powers set forth in the Constitution, granting some power to each branch of the federal government, some to the states, and reserving some for individuals, has been decisively altered over the last 200 years. The federal government they picture is still the people's servant, manageable and tractable. Paradoxically, textbooks then underplay the role of nongovernmental institutions or private citizens in bringing about improvements in the environment, race relations, education, and other social issues. In short, textbook authors portray a heroic state, and, like their other heroes, this one is pretty much without blemishes. Such an approach converts textbooks into anticitizenship manuals—handbooks for acquiescence.

Perhaps the best way to show textbooks' sycophancy is by examining how authors treat the government when its actions have been least defensible. Let us begin with considerations relating to U.S. foreign policy.

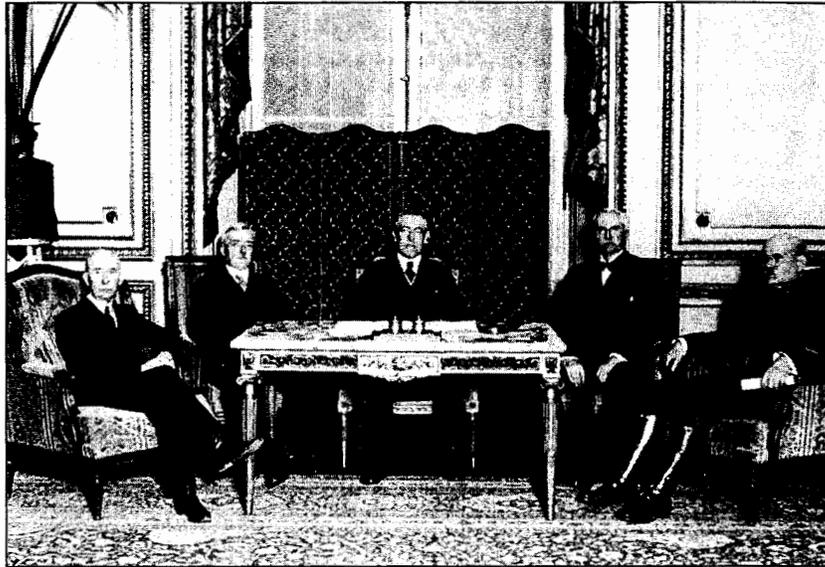
## The Federal Government Abroad: How Textbooks Portray U.S. Foreign Policy

College courses in political science generally take one of two approaches when analyzing U.S. actions abroad. Some professors and textbooks are quite critical of what might be called the American colossus. In this "American century," the United States has been the most powerful nation on earth and has typically acted to maintain its hegemony. This view holds that we Americans abandoned our revolutionary ideology long ago, if indeed we ever held one, and now typically act to repress the legitimate attempts at self-determination of other nations and peoples.

More common is the realpolitik view. George Kennan, who for almost half a century has been an architect of and commentator on U.S. foreign policy, provided a succinct statement of this approach in 1948. As head of the Policy Planning Staff of the State Department, Kennan wrote in a now-famous memorandum:

We have about 50 percent of the world's wealth but only 6.3 percent of its population. In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real test in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity. We need not deceive ourselves that we can afford today the luxury of altruism and world benefaction—unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of living standards, and democratization.

Woodrow Wilson  
with the American  
Peace Commission  
in Paris to negotiate  
the Versailles Treaty.



Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

Under this view, the historian or political scientist proceeds by identifying American national interests as articulated by policymakers in the past as well as by historians today. Then s/he analyzes our acts and policies to assess the degree to which they furthered these interests.

High school American history textbooks do not, of course, adopt or even hint at the American colossus view. Unfortunately, they also omit the realpolitik approach. Instead, they take a strikingly different tack. They see our policies as part of a morality play in which the United States typically acts on behalf of human rights, democracy, and “the American way.” When Americans have done wrong, according to this view, it has been because others misunderstood us, or perhaps because we misunderstood the situation. But always our motives were good. This approach might be called the “international good guy” view.

Textbooks do not indulge in any direct discussion of what “good” is or might mean. In Frances FitzGerald’s phrase, textbooks present the United States as “a kind of Salvation Army to the rest of the world.” In so doing, they echo the nation our leaders like to present to its citizens: the supremely moral, disinterested peacekeeper, the supremely responsible world citizen. “Other countries look to their own interests,” said President John F. Kennedy in 1961, proudly invoking what he termed our “obligations” around the globe. “Only the United States—and we are only six percent of the world’s population—bears this kind of burden.” Since at least the 1920s, textbook authors have claimed that the United States is more generous than any other nation in the world in providing foreign aid. The myth was untrue then; it is likewise untrue now. Today at least a dozen European and Arab nations devote much larger proportions of their gross domestic product (GDP) or total governmental expenditures to foreign aid than does the United States.

The desire to emphasize our humanitarian dealings with the world influences what textbook authors choose to include and omit. All but one of the 12 textbooks contain at least a paragraph on the Peace Corps. The tone of these treatments is adoring. “The Peace Corps made friends for America everywhere,” gushes *Life and Liberty. Triumph of the American Nation* infers our larger purpose: “The Peace Corps symbolized America’s desire to provide humane assistance as well as economic and military leadership in the non-communist world.” As a shaper of history, however, the Peace Corps has been insignificant. It does not disparage this fine institution to admit that its main impact has been on the intellectual development of its own volunteers.

More important and often less affable American exports are our multinational corporations. One multinational alone, International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT), which took the lead in prompting our government to destabilize the socialist government of Salvador Allende, had more impact on Chile than all the Peace Corps workers America ever sent there. The same might be said of Union Carbide in India and United Fruit in Guatemala.

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Textbooks might begin discussing the influence of multinational corporations on U.S. foreign policy with the administration of Woodrow Wilson. Pressure from First National Bank of New York helped prompt Wilson's intervention in Haiti. U.S. interests owned more of Mexico than interests from anywhere else, including Mexico itself, which helps explain Wilson's repeated invasions of that country. In Russia, the new communist government nationalized all petroleum assets; as a consequence, Standard Oil of New Jersey was "the major impetus" behind American opposition to the Bolsheviks, according to historian Barry Weisberg.

Textbooks mystify these circumstances, however. The closest they come to telling the story of economic influences on our foreign policy is in passages such as this, from *The Challenge of Freedom*, regarding Wilson's interventions in Mexico: "Many Americans were very interested in the outcome of these events in Mexico. This was because over 40,000 Americans lived in Mexico. Also, American businesses had invested about 1 billion dollars in Mexico." Here *Challenge* makes almost a pun of *interested*. In its ensuing analysis of Wilson's interventions, *Challenge* never again mentions American interests and instead takes Wilson's policies at face value. The treatment of Wilson's Haitian invasion in *The American Pageant* is still more naive:

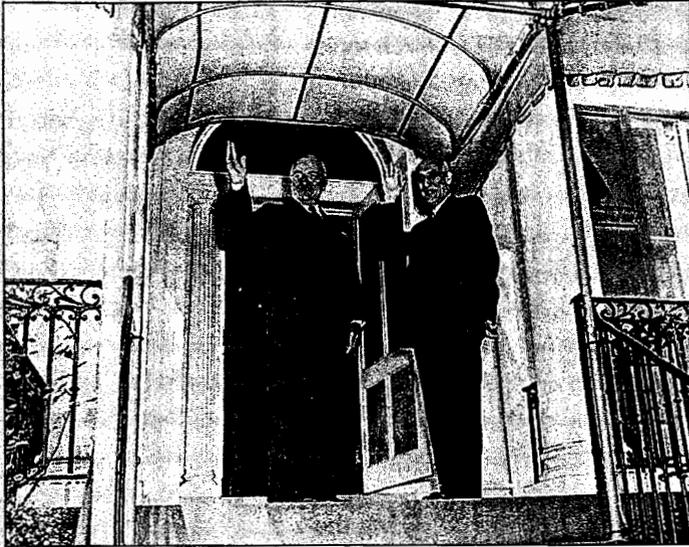
Hoping to head off trouble, Washington urged Wall Street bankers to pump dollars into the financial vacuums in Honduras and Haiti to keep out foreign funds. The United States, under the Monroe Doctrine, would not permit foreign nations to intervene, and consequently it had some moral obligation to interfere financially to prevent economic and political chaos.

Evidently even our financial intervention was humanitarian! The authors of *Pageant* could use a shot of the realism supplied by former Marine Corps Gen. Smedley D. Butler, whose 1931 statement has become famous:

I helped make Mexico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenue in. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers....I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras "right" for American fruit companies in 1903. Looking back on it might have given Al Capone a few hints.

Nonetheless, no textbook ever mentions the influence of multinationals on U.S. policy. This is the case not necessarily because textbook authors are afraid of offending multinationals, but because they never discuss *any* influence on U.S. policy. Rather, they present our governmental policies as rational humanitarian responses to trying situations, and they do not seek to penetrate the surface of the government's own explanations of its actions.

Having ignored *why* the federal government acts as it does, textbooks proceed to ignore much of *what* the government does. Textbook authors portray the U.S. government's actions as agreeable and nice, even when U.S. government officials have admitted motives and intentions of a quite different nature. Among the less savory examples are various attempts by U.S. officials and agencies to assassinate leaders or bring down governments of other countries. The United States has indulged in activities of this sort at least since the Wilson administration, which hired two Japanese-Mexicans to try to poison Pancho Villa. I surveyed the 12 textbooks to see how they treated six more



President Truman and Prime Minister Mohammad Mussadegh of Iran, October 1951.

recent U.S. attempts to subvert foreign governments. To ensure that the events were adequately covered in the historical literature, I examined only incidents that occurred [in or] before 1973, well before any of these textbooks went to press. The episodes are:

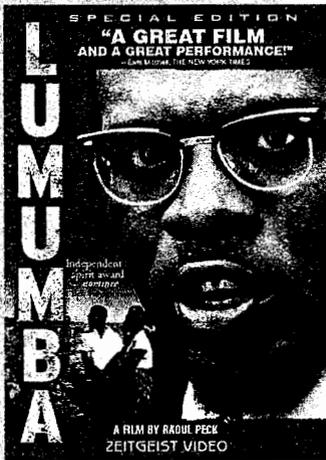
1. Our assistance to the shah's faction in Iran in deposing Prime Minister Mussadegh and returning the shah to the throne in 1953;
2. Our role in bringing down the elected government of Guatemala in 1954;
3. Our rigging of the 1957 election in Lebanon, which entrenched the Christians on top and led to the Muslim revolt and civil war the next year;
4. Our involvement in the assassination of Patrice Lumumba of Zaire in 1961;
5. Our repeated attempts to murder Premier Fidel Castro of Cuba and bring down his government by terror and sabotage; and
6. Our role in bringing down the elected government of Chile in 1973.

The U.S. government calls actions such as these "state-sponsored terrorism" when other countries do them to us. ...

[Editors' note: We only include the author's descriptions of #4 and #6 here. However, the other episodes on the list make great topics for student research and are described in the full version of this article in *Lies My Teacher Told Me.*]

"Zaire" or "the Congo" appears in the index of just two textbooks, *The American Pageant* and *Triumph of the American Nation*. Neither book mentions that the CIA urged the assassination of Patrice Lumumba in 1961. *Pageant* offers an accurate account of the beginning of the strife: "The African Congo received its independence from Belgium in 1960 and immediately exploded into violence. The United Nations sent in a peace-keeping force, to which Washington contributed much money but no manpower." There *Pageant* stops. The account in *Triumph of the American Nation* mentions Lumumba by name: "A new crisis developed in 1961 when Patrice Lumumba, leader of the pro-communist faction, was assassinated." *Triumph* says nothing about U.S. involvement with the assassination, however, and concludes with the happiest of endings: "By the late 1960's, most scars of the civil war seemed healed. The Congo (Zaire) became one of the most prosperous African nations." Would that it were! The CIA helped bring to power Joseph Mobutu, a former army sergeant. By the end of the 1960s, *Triumph* to the contrary, Zaire under Mobutu had become one of the most wretched African nations, economically and politically. As of 1993, Mobutu had yet to hold an election, allow the free functioning of political parties, or condone a free press. The *New York Times* noted that starvation was growing in Zaire and called the problems "self-inflicted, the result of nearly 30 years of Government corruption." While per capita income in Zaire fell by more than two-thirds, Mobutu himself became one of the richest persons on the planet and perhaps the most hated person in the country. As I write in 1994, Zaire is ripe for a "new" crisis to "develop," quite possibly with anti-American overtones. If it does, we can be sure, textbooks will be just as surprised as our students when "chaos breaks out."

Undaunted by its failures in Cuba, the CIA turned its attention farther south. Only three textbooks, *Life and Liberty*, *The American Adventure*, and *Triumph of the American Nation*, mention Chile. "President Nixon helped the Chilean army overthrow Chile's elected government because he did not like its radical socialist policies," *Life and Liberty*



says bluntly. This single sentence, which is all that *Life and Liberty* offers, lies buried in a section about President Carter's human rights record, but it is far and away the best account in any of the textbooks. According to *Triumph*, Nixon approved "the secret use of funds by the CIA to try to prevent a socialist-communist election victory in Chile. The CIA later made it difficult for the Marxist government elected by these parties to govern." Since the "difficulties" President Allende faced included his own murder, perhaps this is the ultimate euphemism! *The American Adventure* offers a fuller account:

Some people, in the United States and abroad, said that the United States arranged the overthrow of Allende. Indeed, in 1974, Pres. Ford admitted that the United States CIA had given help to the opposition to Allende. However, he denied that the United States encouraged or knew of the revolutionary plan.

Why leave our involvement open to question? Historians know that the CIA had earlier joined with ITT to try to defeat Allende in the 1970 elections. Failing this, the United States sought to disrupt the Chilean economy and bring down Allende's government. The United States blocked international loans to Chile, subsidized opposition newspapers, labor unions, and political parties, denied spare parts to industries, paid for and fomented a nationwide truckers' strike that paralyzed the Chilean economy, and trained and financed the military that staged the bloody coup in 1973 in which Allende was killed. The next year, CIA Director William Colby testified that "a secret high-level intelligence committee led by Kissinger himself had authorized CIA expenditures of over \$8,000,000 during the period 1970-73 to 'destabilize' the government of President Allende." Secretary of State Kissinger himself later explained, "I don't see why we have to let a country go Marxist just because its people are irresponsible." Since the Chilean people's "irresponsibility" consisted of voting for Allende, here Kissinger openly says that the United States should not and will not respect the electoral process or sovereignty of another country if the results do not please us. With this attitude and policy in place in our government, whether the CIA or its Chilean allies pulled the trigger on Allende amounts to a nitpicking detail. *The American Adventure* at least mentions our action in Chile; however, nine books overlook it entirely.

Do textbooks need to include all government skulduggery? Certainly not. I am *not* arguing in favor of what Paul Gagnon calls "relentless mentioning." Textbooks do need to analyze at least *one* of our interventions in depth, however, for they raise important issues. To defend these acts on moral grounds is not easy. The acts diminish U.S. foreign policy to the level of Mafia thuggery, strip the United States of its claim to lawful conduct, and reduce our prestige around the world. To be sure, covert violence may be defensible on realpolitik grounds as an appropriate way to deal with international problems. It can be argued that the United States *should be* destabilizing governments in other countries, assassinating leaders unfriendly to us, and fighting undeclared unpublicized wars. The six cloak-and-dagger operations recounted here do not support this view, however. In Cuba, for instance, the CIA's "pointless sabotage operations," in Rhodri's words, "only increased Castro's popularity." Even when they succeed, these covert acts provide only a short-term fix, keeping people who worry us out of power for a time, but identifying the United States with repressive, undemocratic, unpopular regimes, hence undermining our long-term interests. The historian Ronald Kessler relates that a CIA officer responsible for engineering Arbenz's downfall in Guatemala agreed later that overthrowing elected leaders is a short-sighted policy. "Was it desirable to trade Mussadeh for the Ayatollah Khomeini?" asks the historian Charles Ameringer about our "success" in Iran. When covert attacks fail, like the Bay of Pigs landing in 1961, they leave the U.S. government with no viable next step short of embarrassed withdrawal or overt military intervention. If instead of covert action we had had a public debate about how to handle Mussadeh or Castro, we might have avoided Khomeini or the Bay of Pigs debacle. Unless we become more open to nationalist governments that embody the dreams of their people, Robert F. Smith believes we will face "crisis after crisis."

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This debate cannot take place in American history courses, however, because most textbooks do not let on about what our government has done. Half of the 12 textbooks I surveyed leave out all six incidents. Most of the other textbooks pretend, when treating the one or two incidents they include, that our actions were based on humanitarian motives. Thus, textbook authors portray the United States basically as an idealistic actor, responding generously to other nations' social and economic woes. Robert Leckie has referred to "the myth of 'the most peace-loving nation in the world'" and noted that it persists "in American folklore." It also persists in our history textbooks.

These interventions raise another issue: Are they compatible with democracy? Covert violent operations against foreign nations, individuals, and political parties violate the openness on which our own democracy relies. Inevitably, covert international interference leads to domestic lying. U.S. citizens cannot possibly critique government policies if they do not know of them. Thus, covert violent actions usually flout the popular will. These actions also threaten our long-standing separation of powers, which textbooks so justly laud in their chapters on the Constitution. Covert actions are always undertaken by the executive branch, which typically lies to the legislative branch about what it has done and plans to do, thus preventing Congress from playing its constitutionally intended role.

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The sole piece of criminal government activity that most of the textbooks treat is the series of related scandals called Watergate. In its impact on the public, the Watergate break-in stood out. In the early 1970s Congress and the American people learned that President Nixon had helped to cover up a string of illegal acts, including burglaries of the Democratic National Committee and the office of Lewis Fielding, a psychiatrist. Nixon also tried with some success to use the Internal Revenue Service, the FBI, the CIA, and various regulatory agencies to inspire fear in the hearts of his "enemies list" of people who had dared to oppose his policies or his reelection. In telling of Watergate, textbooks blame Richard Nixon, as they should. But they go no deeper. Faced with this undeniable instance of wrongdoing, they manage to retain their uniformly rosy view of the government. In the representative words of *The United States—A History of the Republic*, "Although the Watergate crisis was a shock to the nation, it demonstrated the strength of the federal system of checks and balances. Congress and the Supreme Court had successfully checked the power of the President when he appeared to be abusing that power."

As Richard Rubenstein has pointed out, "the problem will not go away with the departure of Richard Nixon," because it is structural, stemming from the vastly increased power of the federal executive bureaucracy. Indeed, in some ways, the Iran-Contra scandal of the Reagan-Bush administrations, a web of secret legal and illegal acts involving the president, vice-president, cabinet members, special operatives such as Oliver North, and government officials in Israel, Iran, Brunei, and elsewhere, shows an executive branch more out of control than Nixon's. Textbooks' failure to put Watergate into this perspective is part of their authors' apparent program to whitewash the federal government so that schoolchildren will respect it. Since the structural problem in the government has not gone away, it is likely that students will again, in their adult lives, face an out-of-control federal executive pursuing criminal foreign and domestic policies. To the extent that their understanding of the government comes from their American history courses, students will be shocked by these events and unprepared to think about them.

"Our country, ...may she always be in the right," toasted Stephen Decatur in 1816, "but our country, right or wrong!" Educators and textbook authors seem to want to inculcate the next generation into blind allegiance to our country. Going a step beyond Decatur, textbook analyses fail to assess our actions abroad according to either a standard of either right and wrong *or* realpolitik. Instead, textbooks merely assume that the government tried to do the right thing. Citizens who embrace the textbook view would presumably support any intervention, armed or otherwise, and any policy, protective of our

legitimate national interests or not, because they would be persuaded that all our policies and interventions are on behalf of humanitarian aims. They could never credit our enemies with equal humanity.

This “international good guy” approach is educationally dysfunctional if we seek citizens who are able to think rationally about American foreign policy. To the citizen raised on textbook platitudes, George Kennan’s realpolitik may be painful to contemplate. Under the thrall of the America-the-good archetype, we expect more from our country. But Kennan describes how nations actually behave. We would not risk the decline of democracy and the end of Western civilization if we simply let students see a realistic description and analysis of our foreign policies. Doing so would also help close the embarrassing gap between what high school textbooks say about American foreign policy and how their big brother, college textbooks in political science courses, treat the subject.

## The Federal Government at Home: Focus on the Civil Rights Movement

When high school history textbooks turn to the internal affairs of the U.S. government, the books again part company with political scientists. A large chunk of introductory political science coursework is devoted to analyzing the various forces that influence our government’s domestic policies. High school American history textbooks simply credit the government for most of what gets done. This is not surprising, for when authors idealize the federal government, perforce they also distort the real dynamic between the governed and the government. It is particularly upsetting to watch this happen in the field of civil rights, where the courageous acts of thousands of citizens in the 1960s entreated and even forced the government to act.

Between 1960 and 1968, the Civil Rights Movement repeatedly appealed to the federal government for protection and for implementation of federal law, including the 14th Amendment and other laws passed during Reconstruction. Especially during the Kennedy administration, governmental response was woefully inadequate. In Mississippi, Movement offices displayed this bitter rejoinder:

**THERE’S A STREET IN ITTA BENA CALLED FREEDOM.**

**THERE’S A TOWN IN MISSISSIPPI CALLED LIBERTY.**

**THERE’S A DEPARTMENT IN WASHINGTON CALLED JUSTICE.**

The Federal Bureau of Investigation’s response to the Movement’s call was especially important, since the FBI is the premier national law enforcement agency. The bureau had a long and unfortunate history of antagonism toward African Americans. J. Edgar Hoover and the agency that became the FBI got their start investigating alleged communists during the Woodrow Wilson administration. Although the last four years of that administration saw more antiblack race riots than any other time in our history, Wilson had agents focus on gathering intelligence on African Americans, not on white Americans who were violating blacks’ civil rights. Hoover explained the antiblack race riot of 1919 in Washington, D.C., as due to “the numerous assaults committed by Negroes upon white women.” In that year the agency institutionalized its surveillance of black organizations, not white organizations like the Ku Klux Klan. In the bureau’s early years there were a few black agents, but by the 1930s Hoover had weeded out all but two. By the early 1960s the FBI had not a single black officer, although Hoover tried to claim it did by counting his chauffeurs. FBI agents in the South were mostly white Southerners who cared what their white neighbors thought of them and were themselves white supremacists. And although this next complaint is reminiscent of the diner who protested that the soup was terrible and there wasn’t enough of it, the bureau had far too few

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agents in the South. In Mississippi it had no office at all and relied for its initial reports on local sheriffs and police chiefs, often precisely the people from whom the Civil Rights Movement sought protection.

Even in the 1960s Hoover remained an avowed white supremacist who thought the 1954 Supreme Court decision outlawing racial segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education* was a terrible error. He helped Kentucky prosecute a Caucasian civil rights leader, Carl Braden, for selling a house in a white neighborhood to a black family. In August 1963 Hoover initiated a campaign to destroy Martin Luther King Jr., and the Civil Rights Movement. With the approval of Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, he tapped the telephones of King's associates, bugged King's hotel rooms, and made tape recordings of King's conversations with and about women. The FBI then passed on the lurid details, including photographs, transcripts, and tapes, to Sen. Strom Thurmond and other white supremacists, reporters, labor leaders, foundation administrators, and, of course, the president. In 1964 a high FBI administrator sent a tape recording of King having sex, along with an anonymous note suggesting that King kill himself, to the office of King's organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The FBI must have known that the incident might not actually persuade King to commit suicide; the bureau's intention was apparently to get Coretta Scott King to divorce her husband or to blackmail King into abandoning the Civil Rights Movement. The FBI tried to sabotage receptions in King's honor when he traveled to Europe to claim the Nobel Peace Prize. Hoover called King "the most notorious liar in the country" and tried to prove that the SCLC was infested with communists. King wasn't the only target: Hoover also passed on disinformation about the Mississippi Summer Project, other civil rights organizations such as CORE and SNCC, and other civil rights leaders, including Jesse Jackson.

At the same time, the FBI refused to pass on to King information about death threats to him. The FBI knew these threats were serious, for civil rights workers were indeed being killed. In Mississippi alone, civil rights workers endured more than a thousand arrests at the hands of local officials, 35 shooting incidents, and six murders. The FBI repeatedly claimed, however, that protecting civil rights workers from violence was not its job. In 1962 SNCC sued Robert F. Kennedy and J. Edgar Hoover to force them to protect civil rights demonstrators. Desperate to get the federal government to enforce the law in the Deep South, Mississippi civil rights workers Amzie Moore and Robert Moses hit upon the 1964 "Freedom Summer" idea: Bring 1,000 northern college students, most of them white, to Mississippi to work among blacks for civil rights. Even this helped little: White supremacists bombed 30 homes and burned 37 black churches in the summer of 1964 alone. After the national outcry prompted by the murders of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner in Philadelphia, Mississippi, however, the FBI finally opened an office in Jackson. Later that summer, at the 1964 Democratic national convention in Atlantic City, the FBI tapped the phones of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and Martin Luther King Jr. In so doing, the bureau was complying with a request from President Lyndon Johnson.

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The FBI's attack on black and interracial organizations was national in scope. The FBI's conduct and the federal leadership that tolerated it and sometimes requested it are part of the legacy of the 1960s, alongside such positive achievements as the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. As Kenneth O'Reilly put it, "when the FBI stood against black people, so did the government." How do American history textbooks treat this legacy? They simply leave out everything bad the government ever did. They omit not only the FBI's campaign against the Civil Rights Movement, but also its break-ins and undercover investigations of church groups, organizations promoting changes in U.S. policy in Latin America, and the U.S. Supreme Court. Textbooks don't even want to say anything bad about *state* governments: All ten narrative textbooks in my sample include

part of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, but nine of them censor out his negative comments about the governments of Alabama and Mississippi.

Not only do textbooks fail to blame the federal government for its opposition to the Civil Rights Movement, but many actually credit the government, almost single-handedly, for the advances made during the period. In so doing, textbooks follow what we might call the Hollywood approach to civil rights. To date, Hollywood's main feature film on the Movement is Alan Parker's *Mississippi Burning*. In that movie, the three civil rights workers get killed in the first five minutes; for the rest of its two hours the movie portrays not a single civil rights worker or black Mississippian over the age of 12 with whom the viewer could possibly identify. Instead, Parker concocts two fictional white FBI agents who play out the hoary "good cop/bad cop" formula and in the process double-handedly solve the murders. In reality—that is, in the real story on which the movie is based—supporters of the Civil Rights Movement, including Michael Schwerner's widow, Rita, and every white northern friend the Movement could muster, pressured Congress and the executive branch of the federal government to force the FBI to open a Mississippi office and make bringing the murderers to justice a priority. Meanwhile, Hoover tapped Schwerner's father's telephone to see if he might be a communist! Everyone in eastern Mississippi knew for weeks who had committed the murder and that the Neshoba County deputy sheriff was involved. No innovative police work was required; the FBI finally apprehended the conspirators after bribing one of them with \$30,000 to testify against the others.

American history textbooks offer a Parker-like analysis of the entire Civil Rights Movement. Like the arrests of the Mississippi Klansmen, advances in civil rights are simply the result of good government. Federal initiative in itself "explains" such milestones as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. John F. Kennedy proposed them, Lyndon Baines Johnson passed them through Congress, and thus we have them today. Or, in the immortal passive voice of *American History*, "Another civil rights measure, the Voting Rights Act, was passed." Several textbooks even reverse the time order, putting the bills first, the Civil Rights Movement later. Only *American Adventures* and *Discovering American History* show the basic dynamics of the Civil Rights Movement: African Americans, often with white allies, challenged an unjust law or practice in a nonviolent way, which then incited whites to respond barbarically to defend "civilization," in turn appalling the nation and convincing some people to change the law or practice. Only the same two books celebrate the courage of the civil rights volunteers. And only *Discovering American History* tells how the Movement directly challenged the mores of segregation, with the result that some civil rights workers were killed or beaten by white racists simply for holding hands as an interracial couple or eating together in a restaurant. No book educates students about the dynamics that in a democracy should characterize the interrelationship between the people and their government. Thus, no book tells how citizens can, and in fact have, forced the government to respond to them. Instead, textbooks tell us about the outstanding leadership of John F. Kennedy on civil rights. *The*



Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration

*President Eisenhower meets with Martin Luther King Jr. (left) and A. Philip Randolph (right) in the Oval Office on June 23, 1958.*

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*Challenge of Freedom* provides a typical treatment:

President Kennedy and his administration responded to the call for racial equality. In June 1963 the President asked for congressional action on far-reaching equal rights laws. Following the President's example, thousands of Americans became involved in the equal rights movement as well. In August 1963 more than 200,000 people took part in a march in Washington, D.C.

This account reverses leader and led. In reality, Kennedy initially tried to stop the march and sent his vice-president to Norway to keep him away from it because he felt Lyndon Johnson was too pro-civil rights. Even Arthur Schlesinger Jr., a Kennedy partisan, has dryly noted that "the best spirit of Kennedy was largely absent from the racial deliberations of his presidency."

The damage is not localized to the unfounded boost textbooks give to Kennedy's reputation, however. When describing the attack on segregation that culminated in the 1954 Supreme Court decision, *Triumph of the American Nation* makes no mention that African Americans were the plaintiffs and attorneys in *Brown v. Board of Education* or that prior cases also brought by the NAACP prepared the way. Today, many black students think that desegregation was something the federal government imposed on the black community. They have no idea it was something the black community forced on the federal government. Meanwhile, young white Americans can reasonably infer that the federal government has been nice enough to blacks. Crediting the federal government for actions instigated by African Americans and their white allies surely disempowers African-American students today, surely helps them feel that they "have never done anything," as Malcolm X put it.

Textbooks treat the environmental movement similarly, telling how "Congress passed" the laws setting up the Environmental Protection Agency, while giving little or no attention to the environmental crusade. Students are again left to infer that the government typically does the right thing on its own. Many teachers don't help; a study of 12 randomly selected teachers of 12th-grade American government courses found that about the only way the teachers suggested that individuals could influence local or national governments was through voting.

Textbook authors seem to believe that Americans can be loyal to their government only so long as they believe it has never done anything bad. Textbooks therefore present a U.S. government that deserves students' allegiance, not their criticism. "We live in the greatest country in the world," wrote James F. Delong, an associate of the right-wing textbook critic Mel Gabler, in his critique of *American Adventures*. "Any book billing itself as a story of this country should certainly get that heritage and pride across." *American Adventures*, in conveying the basic dynamic of the Civil Rights Movement, implies that the U.S. government was not doing all it should for civil rights. Perhaps as a result, *Adventures* failed Delong's patriotism test: "I will not, I cannot endorse it for use in our schools."

...

[The] textbook authors' servile approach to the government [cannot] teach students to be effective citizens. Just as the story of Columbus-the-wise has as its flip side the archetype of the superstitious unruly crew, so the archetype of a wise and good government implies that the correct role for us citizens is to follow its leadership. Without pushing the point too far, it does seem that many 20th-century nondemocratic states, from the Third Reich to the Central African Empire, have had citizens who gave their governments too much rather than too little allegiance. The United States, on the other hand, has been blessed with dissenters. Some of these dissenters have had to flee the country. Since 1776 Canada has provided a refuge for Americans who disagreed with policies of the U.S. government, from Tories who fled harassment during and after the Revolution, to free

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

**Memorandum**

TO : Mr. W. C. Sullivan

FROM : Mr. H. P. Dearing

SUBJECT: STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE  
RESEARCH-SATELLITE MATTER

1 - Mr. DeLoach  
1 - Mr. E. C. Sullivan  
1 - Mr. C. D. Brennan  
1 - Mr. Casper  
1 - Section Tackler

DATE: August 8, 1967

APPROVAL is requested for captioned monograph to be disseminated to all field offices and Legal Attaches and to interested Government agencies and officials on the enclosed list.

This monograph depicts the evolution of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) from a peaceful civil rights movement primarily devoted to direct-action, voter registration campaigns for the Negro in the Deep South to a hate group preaching violence and black supremacy. Created in 1960, SNCC veered to its present course when Stokely Carmichael became national chairman in May, 1966, and popularized the slogan of "Black Power."

Now, under the flagrantly incendiary leadership of E. Ray Green, SNCC is motivated by a revolutionary, direct-action, antisocial ideology that places no faith in normal democratic procedures. There can be no doubt that SNCC's present collision course with American society makes it a potent threat to racial peace.

The enclosed monograph has been proofread by the Reading Room. Upon approval, it should be returned to the Central Research Unit of the Research-Satellite Section, where arrangements will be made for its printing and distribution.

RECOMMENDATION: ST-104

That this monograph, the yellow file copy of which is enclosed, be approved for dissemination to all field offices and Legal Attaches and for mailing without cover lettering in accordance with previously approved procedure, to the Government officials and agencies on the enclosed list.

Enclosure (2)

100-438190

LLV:st  
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100-438190-1386

ST-104

RESEARCH-SATELLITE MATTER

http://foia.fbi.gov/sncc/sncc2a.pdf

## FBI Files

These primary documents are reprinted from the Freedom of Information Act website ([www.foia.fbi.gov](http://www.foia.fbi.gov)), where there are literally thousands of unclassified FBI files. They provide a rich source of information and evidence about the activities of the FBI described in this article and others in this book, such as "The Black Panther Party" and "The Bloody Wake of Alcatraz."

The document above is from a collection of memos written about SNCC. This memo is dated August 8, 1967.

The document to the right is from the "Report of the Department of Justice Task Force to Review the FBI Martin Luther King Jr. Security and Assassination Investigations." It states that the bureau was determined to "discredit and ultimately destroy [King's] leadership role in the Civil Rights Movement."

"In view of this situation, realism makes it mandatory that we take every prudent step that we can take to emerge completely victoriously in this conflict. We should not take any ineffective or half-way measures, nor blind ourselves to the realities of the situation."  
(HQ 100-106470-627.)

We believe the persistent controversy between Dr. King and Director Hoover was a major factor in the Bureau's determination to discredit Dr. King and ultimately destroy his leadership role in the civil rights movement.

### 4. Technical Surveillance

Our review of FBI files and interviews with Bureau personnel substantially confirms with a few additions the findings which have already been reported by Mr. Murphy and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence with respect to the electronic surveillance of Dr. King and his associates.

We found that some microphones were installed in New York City against Dr. King and his associates which have not thus far been reported. These installations were as follows:

NEW YORK OFFICE (NY 100-106470-2224, 4048)  
4/2-3/65 (symbol)  
6/3-3/65 (symbol)  
1/21-34/66 (no symbol)

SHARPTON APARTMENT (NY 100-136385 Sub-Files 7-8)  
12/10-11/65 (symbol)

NEW YORK HILTON (NY 100-136385 Sub-Files 11-12)  
10/25-27/65 (symbol)

foia.fbi.gov/sncc/sncc2a.pdf

blacks who sought haven from the *Dred Scott* ruling, to young men of draftable age who opposed the Vietnam War. No textbook mentions this Canadian role, because no textbook portrays a U.S. government that might ever merit such principled opposition....

By downplaying covert and illegal acts by the government, textbook authors narcotize students from thinking about such issues as the increasing dominance of the executive branch. By taking the government's side, textbooks encourage students to conclude that criticism is incompatible with citizenship. And by presenting government actions in a vacuum, rather than as responses to such institutions as multinational corporations and civil rights organizations, textbooks mystify the creative tension between the people and their leaders. All this encourages students to throw up their hands in the belief that the government determines everything anyway, so why bother, especially if its actions are usually so benign. Thus, our American history textbooks minimize the potential power of the people and, despite their best patriotic efforts, take a stance that is overtly antidemocratic.

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**James W. Loewen** taught race relations for 20 years at the University of Vermont. Previously he taught at predominantly black Tougaloo College in Mississippi. He now lives in Washington, D.C., continuing his research on how Americans remember their past. *Lies across America: What Our Historic Markers and Monuments Get Wrong* came out in 1999. His other books include *Mississippi: Conflict and Change*, co-authored with Charles Sallis, which won the Lillian Smith Award for Best Southern Nonfiction but was rejected for public-school text use by the State of Mississippi, leading to the path-breaking First Amendment lawsuit, *Loewen et al. v. Turnipseed et al.* He attended Carleton College and holds a Ph.D. in sociology from Harvard University.