124

<http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2009/09/religion_in_american_history_-_but_in_public-school_textbooks.html>

**Religion in American History, but in Public School Textbooks?**

*The Texas Board of Education, the nation's second largest purchaser of  
public school textbooks, is revising its K-12 social studies curriculum  
and deciding how to characterize religion's influence on American  
history. Three consultants have recommended emphasizing the roles of the  
Bible, Christianity and civic virtue of religion. / As America's children go back to school, how would you advise the Texas board? How should religion be taught in public schools?*

Religion was *central* to America's first public-school textbook, The New England Primer. Gradually, it became*peripheral*. Now, it's nearly*nonexistent*. Gradual: in communist countries, this eradication of religion was sudden. Irony: religion is back into Russia's public schools, but not into America's.

1.....In a public school 80 years ago, I experienced the earliest stage of this abolition of religion from American education. Our schools were of course Protestant: Euro-America began as a Protestant country with a few minorities. But as the Roman Catholic population increased, Catholic authorities became increasingly determined to drive Protestantism out of our public schools. (In 1933, I looked forward to studying the English classic John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," which my older sister was reading in school that year; but by year's end, Catholic pressure had succeeded in adding it to the banned-books list.) Other non-Protestant minorities joined in, and in 1962*the U.S. Supreme Court eliminated* "school prayer" - specifically, *acts of reverence (including Bible-reading) at the beginning of the school-day.*

2.....This Supreme Court wipe-out of religion from our public schools began in 1948 with the *prohibition of religious instruction*. The series of religion-negations included, in 1985, *the forbidding of a moment of silence* to begin the school-day: silence, it was argued, might suggest prayer, which would violate the no-establishment-of-religion clause of the First Amendment. The progression was completed in a 1994 decision: the original intent was no preference of one church over another; then, no preference of one religion over another; then (1994), "no preference of religion to irreligion." But was not that anti-silence decision of 1985 a preference of irreligion in the sense that the court feared religion might occur in a school-mandated moment of silence?

3.....Results?  
3.1  
A growing alienation of American society from the Federal government. The people feel helpless in face of the Federal government's throttling of religion in public education, but they can yell down as "big government" any significant Federal healthcare program.  
3.2  
The alienation of religion and science from each other. The author of "Unscientific America" is an atheist who wants to overcome the public's resistance to science. But his "science" is the atheistic philosophy properly termed "scientism," which in American public education has taken the central place which religion had. Indeed, it is a philosophy functioning as a religion.  
3.3  
The alienation of many of our brighter children from God. Our public schools teach our children to sin by making sense of life and the universe without "God" as a word & as the ultimate reality: the Bible teaches that the worst sin is God-amnesia, forgetting God while making sense. Most of the commenters on my On Faith entries are bright atheists. School taught them to sin by making sense without God, who therefore is extraneous to their values. The Bible? To them it's a collection of superstitious stories most of them have never heard: their biblical ignorance should not shock me, but it does. (The Greek word "atheist" means literally "no God"; most atheists are passive, not "anti-God" aggressive.)  
3.4  
The alienation of the two Americas - theistic and atheistic - from each other. The Rev. Peter Marshall, one of the reviewers for the Texas Board of Education, put it well: "We're in an all-out moral and spiritual war for the soul of America," and how American history is written for our school-children to read "is at the heart of it."

4.....American historian Mark Noll rightly teaches that the U.S. had "two foundings," the first emphasizing*Enlightenment*values and the second, immediately following, the values of *evangelical Christianity* (centering in the Bible). To be fair as well as to be scholarly, American history should give full weight to both and superior status to neither.

5.....I suggest that Texas public-school children will be well served if their American-history textbooks (1) fairly*represent the religion factor*(on the model of great historians, such as Mark Noll), (2) *avoid ideological distortions* (such as egalitarian multiculturalism), and (3)*include all of America's founding documents*, beginning with the Mayflower Compact. ("How religion should be taught in public schools" is another subject.)

**BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT  |  SEPTEMBER 1, 2009; 11:03 PM ETSAVE & SHARE:  [Send E-mail](http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/emailalink?sent=no&link=http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2009/09/religion_in_american_history_-_but_in_public-school_textbooks.html&title=Religion%20in%20American%20History,%20but%20in%20Public%20School%20Textbooks?)   [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com/sharer.php?u=http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2009/09/religion_in_american_history_-_but_in_public-school_textbooks.html&t=Religion%20in%20American%20History,%20but%20in%20Public%20School%20Textbooks?)   [Twitter](http://twitter.com/home?status=Religion%20in%20American%20History,%20but%20in%20Public%20School%20Textbooks?%20-%20http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2009/09/religion_in_american_history_-_but_in_public-school_textbooks.html)   [Digg](http://digg.com/submit?phase=2&url=http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2009/09/religion_in_american_history_-_but_in_public-school_textbooks.html&title=Religion%20in%20American%20History,%20but%20in%20Public%20School%20Textbooks?)   [Yahoo Buzz](http://buzz.yahoo.com/buzz?publisherurn=washington_po284&guid=washington_po284:http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2009/09/religion_in_american_history_-_but_in_public-school_textbooks.html)   [Del.icio.us](http://del.icio.us/post?url=http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2009/09/religion_in_american_history_-_but_in_public-school_textbooks.html;&title=Religion%20in%20American%20History,%20but%20in%20Public%20School%20Textbooks?%20-%20On%20Faith%20Panelists%20Blog;)   [StumbleUpon](http://www.stumbleupon.com/submit?url=http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2009/09/religion_in_american_history_-_but_in_public-school_textbooks.html)   [Technorati](http://technorati.com/search/http:/onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2009/09/religion_in_american_history_-_but_in_public-school_textbooks.html)    
PREVIOUS:**[**WHAT TO TEACH OUR CHILDREN ABOUT RELIGION**](http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/starhawk/2009/09/what_to_teach_our_children_about_religion.html)**| NEXT:**[**SERIOUS FLAWS IN TEXTBOOK ADOPTION PROCESS**](http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/aseem_shukla/2009/09/lawsuit_showed_serious_flaws_in_textbook_adoption_process.html)

**Comments**

**Please report offensive comments below.**

Hi Rev,

How are you?

So, all hale the Lone Star Republic. Eliminate Ann Hutchinson and the Antinomian Controversy from the curriculum, along with Thurgood Marshall and Cesar Chavez.

Should the include William Bradford? Should they quote him from his Plymouth Plantation journals when he observes the indigenous people burning to death at Christian hands, quoting his Christian Bible as he watched them melt and listened to their screams?

Should they include Rev. Strong and his manifest destiny proclamation, the slogan for the final solution to the Indian problem?

And what of all those famous Christian nazis, such as Lindbergh? Charles, that would be. And the well documented antisemitic Protestant state department of FDR, which helped to enforce policies of exclusion for fleeing European Jews, concealed from America news of the genocide?  
Should we include them?

Of course, exclude the Jews, they who began America's philanthropic tradition, their contributions to equal opportunity in education, their work building the unions of the twentieth century, etc. Why bother with Judaism? Its commitment to economic justice in America? Who, after all wanted it? Certainly not John Winthrop, he who burned the Indians whose ashes were, for him and Bradford, sacrificial offerings to their God?

But then, so have been us Js, no?

**POSTED BY: FARNAZ1MANSOURI1 | SEPTEMBER 5, 2009 7:35 PM**[**REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**](mailto:blogs@washingtonpost.com?subject=On%20Faith%20Panelists%20Blog%20%20|%20%20Farnaz1Mansouri1%20%20|%20%20Religion%20in%20American%20History,%20but%20in%20Public%20School%20Textbooks?%20%20|%20%204702549&body=%0D%0D%0D%0D%0D================%0D?__mode=view%26_type=comment%26id=4702549%26blog_id=618)

It is amazing how christians blame everyone else for their failing to teach morality and social involvement. Perhaps the alienation is from a set of beliefs that don't fit with reality. Perhaps the alienation of the good students is because they can see a truth beyond a book. Perhaps the alienation is due to a dogmatic imposition of false truths on what the common man can see. Perhaps the alienation of theists and non-theists is because the theists keep thinking of god a simple being that they can define and thus offer nothing to the non-theists other then condemnations to hell.

Perchance, the problem is the theists failure to be educated.

hariaum

**POSTED BY: NAVIN1 | SEPTEMBER 4, 2009 5:54 PM**[**REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**](mailto:blogs@washingtonpost.com?subject=On%20Faith%20Panelists%20Blog%20%20|%20%20Navin1%20%20|%20%20Religion%20in%20American%20History,%20but%20in%20Public%20School%20Textbooks?%20%20|%20%204702392&body=%0D%0D%0D%0D%0D================%0D?__mode=view%26_type=comment%26id=4702392%26blog_id=618)

truth is the truth...and you don't know what it is and I don't either. The holy spirit is an idea in your head and only if you suffer from delusion do you think it can get you. Sorry, boogeyman tactics don't work.

**POSTED BY: TXATHEIST | SEPTEMBER 3, 2009 11:58 AM**[**REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**](mailto:blogs@washingtonpost.com?subject=On%20Faith%20Panelists%20Blog%20%20|%20%20TXatheist%20%20|%20%20Religion%20in%20American%20History,%20but%20in%20Public%20School%20Textbooks?%20%20|%20%204702137&body=%0D%0D%0D%0D%0D================%0D?__mode=view%26_type=comment%26id=4702137%26blog_id=618)

Bud, the truth is the truth, and the Holy Spirit is going to get you where you are with or without the efforts of the various arbitors of Christian Worldview insisting on each their indivdual take on the proper setting of the stage.

**POSTED BY: MAMMYYEL | SEPTEMBER 2, 2009 2:24 PM**[**REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**](mailto:blogs@washingtonpost.com?subject=On%20Faith%20Panelists%20Blog%20%20|%20%20mammyyel%20%20|%20%20Religion%20in%20American%20History,%20but%20in%20Public%20School%20Textbooks?%20%20|%20%204701941&body=%0D%0D%0D%0D%0D================%0D?__mode=view%26_type=comment%26id=4701941%26blog_id=618)

The comments to this entry are closed.