

CHAPTER IV: ASSESSING GEOGRAPHY TEXTBOOKS

Textbooks perform the crucial role of initiation into a discipline...As a result, issues...that are absent from the textbook most likely remain absent from the [classroom] (Mayer 1989, 398).

The close relationship between textbook and classroom learning has been well established in numerous studies (Apple 1985). Therefore, many educators and international organizations have encouraged the assessment of educational textbooks in order to ensure that human rights discussions are integrated into the curriculum. UNESCO, for example, has pressed for “the critical examination...of textbooks in all disciplines from the point of view of human rights...on both positive and negative conditions related to human rights, and...open exploration of possibilities for concrete action on behalf of human rights” (UNESCO 1978, 45). Moreover, UNESCO’s *Recommendation Concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education Relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* emphasizes the need for textbook analysis, strongly encouraging governments and educators take

appropriate measures to ensure that educational aids, especially textbooks, are free from elements liable to give rise to misunderstanding, mistrust, racist reactions, contempt or hatred with regard to other groups or peoples. Materials should provide a broad background of knowledge which will help learners to evaluate information and ideas disseminated through the mass media that seem to run counter to the aims of this recommendation....

...Member States should encourage wider exchanges of textbooks, especially history and geography textbooks, and should...take measures...for the reciprocal study and revision of textbooks and other educational materials in order to ensure that they are accurate, balanced, up to date and unprejudiced and will enhance mutual knowledge and understanding between different peoples (UNESCO 1974, 39, 45).

Such a study of introductory, college-level geography textbooks has not yet been completed, and is therefore needed in order to assess whether the discipline of geography adequately discusses such issues.

Methodology

This study employs the methodology of Tamar Mayer’s 1989 study on the representation of women in introductory geography textbooks. In her article, entitled “Consensus and Invisibility: The Representation of Women in Human Geography Textbooks” (*Professional Geographer*), Mayer examines eight introductory human geography textbooks to evaluate the presentation of gender issues and the status of women, as well as to assess whether women’s perceptions and contributions are significantly included in the texts.

Mayer’s methodology is based on the classic text analysis format; a careful reading of the textual content is conducted in order to assess not only the presence of a discussion on a given topic, but also the depth of that discussion and the intended, often unstated, message that is conveyed through the tone of the writing and the material selected. Mayer presents her findings as overall impressions of the representation of women in Human Geography textbooks *in general*.

Indeed, the intent of the study is not to determine the *best* text, but to determine the overall representation of women as presented in the dominant introductory textbooks of the discipline.

As with Mayer's study, the methodology for this textbook analysis required a careful reading of all eight texts. The textbooks selected are all introductory, college-level texts, and were chosen because they are among the most widely-used introductory texts for college-level geographic instruction. The four Regional Geography texts assessed in the study are, in alphabetical order, Bradshaw, *The New Global Order: A World Regional Geography* (1997); Clawson and Fisher, *World Regional Geography: A Development Approach* (1998); De Blij and Muller, *Geography: Realms, Regions and Concepts* (1998); and Pulsipher, *World Regional Geography* (2000). The four Human Geography texts assessed in the study are, in alphabetical order, De Blij and Murphy, *Human Geography: Culture, Society, and Space* (1999); Fellmann, Getis, and Getis, *Human Geography: Landscapes of Human Activities* (1997); Jordan-Bychkov and Domosh, *The Human Mosaic: A Thematic Introduction to Cultural Geography* (1999); and Rubenstein, *The cultural landscape: an introduction to human geography* (1999).

Each text was read in its entirety. Extra steps were included in order to reduce any possible bias in the interpretation of a text's coverage. Each text was photocopied, and the copied pages were then color-coded for each author by a third party. The photocopied pages, rather than the text itself, were then read for content in order to minimize bias. It was not until all texts were read that the author of each text was uncovered. In preparation for the assessment of the texts, however, it became clear that the intent of the study should be to assess the *general* coverage of human rights topics in the dominant introductory textbooks of the discipline. Therefore, individual texts were not given numeric marks or grades; instead, a general impression of the coverage of specific human rights topics in introductory geography textbooks as a whole was sought, and implications on the overall coverage of human rights issues in geography textbooks were drawn.

Rationalization for Selection of Rights

Thirteen human rights issues were selected for this study. They are: ethnic discrimination, child sexual exploitation, modern-day slavery, the use of child soldiers, hazardous child labor, poverty, malnutrition, the rights of refugees, discrimination based on gender, female genital mutilation, culturally-justified violence against women, the right to self-determination, and the right to a liveable wage.

The selection of the human rights to include in the study was based on a deliberate attempt to present a wide range of human rights issues. Six of the topics included in the study address the rights of women and children. Three directly discuss welfare rights; many others do so indirectly. There are individual rights and group rights, economic rights and civil rights, rights which should be familiar to the average American student (slavery, refugees, discrimination based on ethnicity, and discrimination based on gender) and issues that many students have probably never even considered to be a human right (such as the notion that people have a right to a liveable wage or that stateless nations have a right to determine their own future.)

In the following three chapters the rights are arranged according to the degree to which they are recognized as rights, or, conversely, the degree of controversy surrounding the recognition and acceptance of the right. This classification was created for clarity of presentation, and is but one of many that are possible given the interconnectedness of human rights issues.