

Home School History: A Comparison of the Sources  
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How do Christians who home school their children convey the significant facts and the differing interpretations of American history? What sources do they use and which aspects of American history do these sources emphasize, praise, and/or critique? This study seeks to answer those questions by examining some of the most widely used materials on American history. In some cases, there will be overlap between the sources used in evangelical Christian schools and those used for home schooling. Many home schoolers have been content to teach from the same books used in Christian schools, yet, for the purposes of this study, the overlap is irrelevant. The goal is to identify the texts used and to analyze their approaches to American history.

Not every age of American history or issue raised in American history can be covered in a brief paper such as this; an author must decide which aspects provide the best indications of the overall approach. Recognizing there can be differences of opinion on what should be included or omitted, the following individuals/periods/events have been chosen for this analysis: the role and faith of Columbus; the contributions of the Pilgrims and the Puritans; the explanation of the American Revolution; the part played by the devising and implementing of the Constitution; the perspective offered on the existence of slavery and the Civil War; the value and significance of the business boom after the Civil War and the rise of labor unions; the effects of programs and policies initiated by the New Deal and the Great Society; and the extent of the threat of

Communism in America. These selected topics should shed light on the philosophies of history and government in the texts.

The author does not claim to have evaluated all texts being used by Christian home schoolers. New sources continue to be developed. Some home schooling parents concoct their own individualized curricula, drawing upon various sources. There are some texts, though, that can readily be established as pervasive throughout the Christian home schooling community, and it is those that serve as the focus of this study. They are:

- *The History of Our United States* (A Beka Books—elementary level)
- *Heritage of Freedom* (A Beka Books—11<sup>th</sup> grade)
- *A Child's Story of America* (Christian Liberty Press—elementary level)
- *Heritage Studies* series (Bob Jones—3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grades—the analysis of this series does not begin until the section on the Constitution)
- *United States History for Christian Schools* (Bob Jones—11<sup>th</sup> grade)
- *Life in America Unit Studies* (author Ellen Gardner. These are elementary books that incorporate not only sections of history, but use the basic history of the United States as the backdrop for sections on science, English, geography, government, and Bible. The books available for this survey go through the Civil War only, so no analysis of their approach to the twentieth century can be made.)
- *A Basic History of the United States* (author Clarence Carson, Ph.D. from Vanderbilt; 5-book series; American Textbook Committee. This series is not marketed as being explicitly Christian, but its conservative/libertarian positions have a wide appeal among Christian home schoolers, who use it at the high-school level.)

The remainder of the paper will be arranged by historical topic, with commentary on how each source above treats that particular topic.

### Columbus

Why include Columbus in an analysis of American history? The main reason is that Columbus has become quite controversial in our day: he is a symbol to some of European genocide of the native population, while others see him as a solid Catholic Christian who explored for the sake of spreading the kingdom of God. Do these sources share either position? Do they deal with his faith at all?

A Beka's elementary history says that Columbus claimed new land for the Catholic Church and that he wanted "to conquer the world for that church." It then goes on to opine, "But God's plans are not always the same as man's plans. The plans that Columbus and the religious leaders of his faith had for America were not God's plans." A Beka, obviously from its strong Protestant orientation, communicates a spiritual truth, i.e., God's plans are not always the same as man's plans, but does so in the context of critiquing Columbus and, by association, the Catholic Church that he represents. Yet it does go on to praise Columbus for his courage: "Columbus was a great man because he showed others the way to do something that was supposedly impossible—sail across the unknown ocean." Therefore, students are offered both a critique of his motives and recognition that he paved the way for the age of exploration.

The 11<sup>th</sup>-grade text from A Beka again talks about Columbus's Catholic faith, going into more detail. He is called "devout" and "very pious in his works of religion." It even notes that he probably was more devoted to the daily routine of church life than the

average priest. Externally, then, he was a good Catholic. The text further comments that Columbus studied prophetic passages of Scripture and firmly believed that his quest of discovery was an outgrowth of his faith. “Ever conscious that his given name meant ‘Christ-bearer,’ Columbus considered himself a crusader.” One of his goals was to drive the Muslims from the Holy Land and he sensed the divine call to lead that crusade personally. “Yet,” the text says, “his life was not marked by the honesty and moral uprightness we expect of a true Christian hero.” So, while acknowledging that Columbus was acting from religious impulses, the book draws a clear line between intent and actions. In neither A Beka book is the subject of treatment of the natives considered at any length.

Christian Liberty Press’s *A Child’s View of America* does not address Columbus’s religious views at all. Neither does it say anything about how Columbus conducted himself or his desire for glory and riches. Its main focus seems to be the poor treatment he received at the hands of his sponsors. One “rude Spanish governor sent him back to Spain with chains upon his legs.” Ultimately, “he who had ridden beside the king and dined with the highest nobles of Spain became poor, sad and lonely.” Perhaps most surprising is the statement that very few people in Columbus’s time knew the earth was round, a belief long discarded by reliable research.

The Bob Jones high-school text is a short, fact-based account with no religious commentary at all, which is surprising, considering the source. Not so with Gardner’s *Life in a New World*, which begins with the subtitle “Columbus Believed God’s Word.” Columbus’s intention was to convert the people of the Indies to Christianity. While it is acknowledged that Columbus was in error in his calculations, “He would sail by faith.

God intended for the Gospel to be preached to every nation! God himself would make a way for Columbus to take the light of that Gospel across the Atlantic.” The account is fuller than any of the other elementary texts in this survey, yet it never attributes to Columbus any other motive than his desire to take the Gospel to the natives. The only ones who had a lust for gold were the sailors who traveled with him. Native tribes are distinguished from one another, with one being called kind, generous, and innocent, while others were cannibalistic.

Religious commentary is missing from the Carson text, but the author does call Columbus “long on courage but short on knowledge.” Carson says that experts at the time had good reason to dismiss his plans because it was obvious to them that he did not realize how large the world was. Columbus sought riches, never found them, and died in disgrace and poverty. No mention is made of treatment of the natives.

### Pilgrims

While the Pilgrims may not be as controversial in American history as Columbus, they are essential to one’s understanding of the origins of the nation. Some historians see little significance to the Pilgrim adventure, based upon their small numbers and their later incorporation into Massachusetts. Others take the opposite perspective, believing that their courage in traversing the Atlantic, their character under trials, and their formulation of the Mayflower Compact are far more indicative of their influence on later generations. One might expect Christian home schoolers to be uniformly positive about the Pilgrim legacy.

The Pilgrims are the real heroes of America's beginning, according to the A Beka elementary text. They were not like the Jamestown settlers who seemed to love only gold. Instead, the Pilgrims loved religious freedom and God, a devotion that came from their understanding of the Bible and their English heritage. That dual heritage—Biblical and English—gave them the ability to govern themselves. The Mayflower Compact was their way of setting up “a government by laws rather than a government by men only.” The Compact also was the “first written agreement for self-government in America.” The text even goes on to say that the Compact “says many things that the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution . . . would say later.” That last statement, while understandable if one is looking at principles, might be difficult to defend on the face of the evidence; the Compact is merely one paragraph, so how can it say “many things” found in both the Declaration and Constitution? This elementary book does include the full text of the Compact, a clear indication that it is considered significant. Overall, the Pilgrims are important for America because they were “the kind of people that God wants us to be.”

At the high-school level, A Beka concentrates on the Pilgrims as a tolerant people and even pictures the Mayflower voyagers (saints and strangers) as symbols of what America is today: “different people with different ideas, individuals with a variety of backgrounds, goals, beliefs, but able to work together and live together because they respected one another's rights and did not demand that everyone be the same.” As with the elementary book, the full text of the Compact is included and the Pilgrims are considered the originators of America's republican system of self-government.

*A Child's Story of America* praises Plymouth as the birthplace of true liberty and then defines the term: "Liberty is not the right to live as we please, but the power to live as God requires!" While the Mayflower Compact is mentioned, the text is not reproduced as in the A Beka books. Instead, the focus is personal, relating the story of Miles Standish. He is described as a "little man, but he carried a big sword, and had a stout heart and a hot temper. While the Pilgrims came to work and to pray, Captain Standish came to fight." Even the picture in the book of the Pilgrims coming ashore is captioned, "The Landing of Miles Standish." The goal, apparently, is to make the story more real by treating one person, but one might wonder why the one person treated so extensively is the "stranger," Standish, rather than William Bradford or William Brewster.

The Bob Jones high-school text offers a rather basic account of the Pilgrims, but laces it with a couple of quotes from Bradford and credits that man with godly leadership. Further, the text says that the influence of the Pilgrims goes well beyond their numbers. A special sidebar deals with the first Thanksgiving, comparing it with Old Testament feasts, and gives a short history of the celebration of Thanksgiving in America after the Pilgrims, a treatment one would expect to find only in a Christian-based text.

Gardner presents the Pilgrims as "a self-governing type of people. Their devotion to God and each other would have been enough to prevent lawlessness, but they had not sailed alone." Therefore, they needed to draw up the Mayflower Compact to ensure that the strangers amongst them would obey the law. The Compact "established the first self-government in the world and became the model for our Constitution." Calling the Compact the "first self-government in the world" would lead the reader to think that no self-government had ever existed anywhere. And while the concept of representative

government certainly is found in both the Constitution and the Compact, can it really be said that a one-paragraph document is *the* model for the Constitution? This might be more a problem of semantics than substance, but clarification is needed. Squanto is depicted as having been saved by God from the plague that killed off his entire tribe so that he could be a help to the Pilgrims. He was part of God's plan for His people.

Carson clearly expresses the Pilgrims' religious impulse, which he had ignored with Columbus, but his focus is economic—not as an economic determinist, but as one who is touting the value of free enterprise. He relates the story of how the Pilgrims switched from communal farming to private plots of land, along with the subsequent increase in productivity. His goal is to show the wisdom of the switch. In telling the story, he actually paraphrases a portion of Bradford's work, *Of Plimoth Plantation*.

### Puritans

The Puritan colony of Massachusetts Bay has been far more controversial among historians than Plymouth. How do these sources handle the zealous spirit of the Puritans and their treatment of dissenters? Do they see the Puritans as harbingers of religious liberty or as oppressors? The inclination might be to expect Christian texts to be unstinting in their praise, but this is not the case.

John Winthrop is a good man in the A Beka elementary book; he gave generously to help those who were poor when the colony was just beginning. "There were many good things about the Puritan colony of Massachusetts, and there were many good people there," the text relates. But it continues: "Some people, however, were unhappy because of something that Massachusetts did *not* have. There was religious freedom in

Massachusetts for the Puritans, but not for anyone else!” The text goes on to discuss how strange that may seem since the Puritans themselves had come to the New World seeking their own religious freedom. The explanation? “Once they got away from the king of England, they started acting like him!” This was not unusual for the times, the text states, because of the prevalent belief in the union of church and state. However, rather than talking about the better-known episodes of Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson as examples of this intolerance, the text turns instead to the travails of a Baptist target of Puritan criticism, Obadiah Holmes. The discussion ends, though, with the optimistic report that Puritans eventually changed their ways: “The Puritans of Massachusetts came to learn what the Pilgrims already knew: that when one man’s freedom is taken away, everyone’s freedom is threatened.”

A Beka’s high-school version offers a balanced perspective as well. The Puritans had noble principles and gave America a positive heritage of moral living, hard work, industry, and frugality. The negative side was their merger of church and state that punished those who disagreed with the system, and their misguided attempt to enforce wage and price controls in the economy.

If hero worship is the goal of education, then *A Child’s Story of America* provides it in the figure of John Winthrop. There is nothing to indicate that he ever did anything wrong. As with its treatment of the Pilgrims, this text concentrates on a single individual as representative of the entire society. While discussing the Indians in the New World in this same section, the text tries to show atrocities on both sides, yet ends the narrative with this rather astounding piece of information: “In this country, where once there was

constant war and bloodshed, and torturing and burning of prisoners, *now there is peace and kindness and happiness.*” [italics mine] That might qualify as an overstatement.

Puritans in the Bob Jones high-school text are described as people who were attempting to be a city on a hill, quoting Winthrop’s “Model of Christian Charity” sermon. They set up a covenant with God and one another and pursued the building of a Holy Commonwealth. The establishment of Harvard College is indicative of their overall purpose—training young men for the ministry. The text even has a block quote from *New England’s First Fruits* to reveal the strong religious emphasis in the founding of the college. Overall, though, it states that while the colony was a commercial success, it was a spiritual failure.

Gardner explains the difference between the Separatist Pilgrims and the Puritans in a rather unique way. “For those who hike in the mountains, there are two ways to quench your thirst if you find that there have been sheep in the stream, polluting the water. The first is to carry your own water. This is what the Leyden Pilgrims did. They separated themselves from the Church of England and held their own services, even though it was against the law. . . . The second way is to carry a little battery-operated water purifier with you. Settle down on the bank of the stream and purify the water. This is what the group known as the Puritans did. They stayed in the Church, sharing the truths from God’s word in hopes they could purify the Church.”

John Winthrop is depicted as strict, disciplined, and honest. “The Indians called him ‘Single Tongue.’” He also was generous to those who had need and was elected governor twelve times. When dealing with dissent, Gardner offers a somewhat vague interpretation of Anne Hutchinson: she was beautiful, witty, pleasant, and brilliant, with a

“solid knowledge of medicine.” For her work among the sick she was loved and admired by fellow colonists. Her advocacy of Antinomianism got her into trouble, but it is unclear in the text as to whether it was deserved or not. The account ends with the simple statement that she was banished, but then adds, “In Salem, many women received a harsher fate in what has come to be called the Salem Witch Trials.” Is this an expression of concern that the colony singled out women for unfair treatment? Again, it is unclear. Roger Williams, meanwhile, is presented in a completely positive light, with no mention of how his views were potentially damaging to the government of the Massachusetts colony.

Carson provides a perspective largely missing from the other sources when he comments on the significance of removing the Massachusetts Bay Company’s board of directors to the New World, far away from oversight, thus enhancing the colony’s independence from ecclesiastical authority. He explains the centrality of the covenant concept to the Puritans and emphasizes the spiritual mission of the migration. He even quotes a major portion of Winthrop’s sermon, showing his [Carson’s] reliance on original sources.

### American Revolution

The American Revolution is the defining moment in American history. Was it justified? Did the colonists handle the controversy with the Mother Country properly? Do the texts provide a balanced view of the event?

The colonists were happy to be part of the British Empire, but they were being denied their right to representation in the making of their laws, says the A Beka

elementary text. The Boston Massacre was the result of bad British policy, i.e., the placing of soldiers on the streets of Boston, but the colonists were not completely innocent in this matter. “Each side was partly to blame for this terrible mistake,” the book contends. “The colonists were teasing, irritating, and threatening the British soldiers. And the British soldiers fired without orders.” The Declaration of Independence plays a leading role in the narrative, with key portions of the document incorporated into the story.

The high-school version explains that the colonial position in the controversy with Britain was not mere expedience for economic advantage, but a matter of fundamental principle. The Boston Tea Party was an act that was based on principle. It also hails John Adams’s role in defending the British soldiers in the Boston Massacre trial, showing that the incident, from the book’s point of view, was not entirely the fault of the British. The text incorporates quotes from primary sources—Stamp Act Resolves, Resolves of the First Continental Congress—and even includes an annotated Declaration of Independence. True to its Christian mission, this text also has a section entitled “Political Theory and Colonial Churches.”

“When King George was told that the Americans would not send him money he was very angry. I am afraid he called them bad names.” The preceding sentence, the wording of which is childish in a way that might seem demeaning to the children it teaches, is typical of *A Child’s Story of America*. The Boston Tea Party is simply “a most stirring event.” There is not much depth in its analysis of the Revolution.

Bob Jones’s high-school text spends time providing a rationale for the Tea Party. It points out that even though the Tea Act gave colonists cheaper tea, they were upset by

the attempt by Parliament to establish a monopoly for one company. In its discussion of the Tea Party itself, it mentions that “the raiders took great care to avoid damaging anything except the tea. Even a broken padlock was anonymously replaced the next day.” In describing the battle on Lexington green, the book notes that the British major in charge of the troops ordered them to hold their fire. No blame is assigned to either side for firing the first shot, but it does mention that the major was angry that his men had disobeyed his orders. In all, it is an even-handed account of the incident.

One of the sidebars in the Bob Jones text is on Benedict Arnold. It is entitled “The American Judas.” This is not only a reflection of the Biblical allusion that might be expected from a Christian press, but an accurate rendering of what many at the time actually did call Arnold.

In *Life in the Colonies*, Gardner again shows a penchant for using an unusual, or unique, approach to a subject. How to explain the problem between the Mother Country and her colonies? Take the Mother Country image and use it in a way that children might understand. “Bondage can appear beautiful and comforting, at first, like a hug. The first cords of bondage brought a feeling of security to the colonists. It was like Mother England tucking them securely in bed. Being tucked into bed when you are young is a wonderful thing, but America was growing up. She had a work to do for God. The beautiful chains of dependence were beginning to resemble the shackles of a prisoner, and England’s mother hug was beginning to feel more like a bear hug as the Stamp Act squeezed more and more revenue (taxes) from the Americans.” Clearly, she views the colonies as being “squeezed” by Britain, and therefore justified in their concerns.

The text states that the Stamp Act Congress met at the request of Parliament; in fact, it was the result of a circular letter among the colonies. There is also a typographical error, placing the Congress in 1865 rather than 1765. It is important that facts be correct for the interpretation of those facts to receive a fair hearing. More positive is the discussion of the history of tea prior to the Tea Act and Boston Tea Party. This helps provide a good background for the students. When discussing the Battle of Lexington and Concord, no blame is assigned for firing the first shot, although it is noted that the British fired at retreating American colonists.

Clarence Carson's treatment of the Revolution is the most thorough of all the texts surveyed. Before discussing the Revolution itself, he sets the stage with a chapter called "The Spread of Liberating Ideas," which includes sections on Locke, Adam Smith, and the concept of self-government. When he begins analyzing the growing rift between the colonies and Britain, he stresses that the colonists were loyal to the empire right up until the fighting began; the problems, he opines, stemmed from altered British policies toward the colonies. He then supplies a strong economic analysis of the British measures.

His accounts of controversial incidents such as the Battle of Lexington and Concord and the Boston Tea Party are straightforward. His choice of sidebars, including both Edmund Burke and Lord North, highlights players on both sides of the debate over colonial resistance. Lord North is handled with respect. Yet he does include a quote from a parliamentary opponent of British policy, Sir Isaac Barre, who responded to Charles Townshend when he claimed that the colonies were planted by the care of the British government: "They planted by your care? No! Your oppressions planted 'em in America. They fled from your oppression. . . . They nourished by your indulgence? They grew up

by your neglect of 'em. As soon as you began to care about 'em, that care was exercised in sending persons to rule over 'em. . . . They protected by your arms? They have nobly taken up arms in your defence.” Unique to Carson is this attention to parliamentary opposition. Also unique is his detailed analysis of key phrases of the Declaration of Independence, showing how they can be understood in different ways.

### The Constitution

If the American Revolution can be called the defining moment in American history, perhaps its near-equal would be the debating and framing of the Constitution, and the type of government that it gave the nation. Do these sources see the Constitution as a document coming directly from the hand of God or do they take into account the very human aspects of it as well?

“In the history of the world there has probably never been such an assembly of geniuses,” comments A Beka’s elementary text, referring to the Constitutional Convention. Further, “The wisdom about politics that our Founding Fathers at the Convention showed has never been equaled.” Then there is an italicized and bolded sentence as follows: “*The writing of the **Constitution of the United States** and the writing of the **Declaration of Independence** are two of the most important events that have contributed to the happiness and progress of all mankind.*” A couple sentences further, it reads, “Everybody was convinced that the hand of God was in the work that was being done at this Convention.” The text then goes on to quote Franklin’s famous words at the Convention about God governing in the affairs of men. Portions of the Constitution quoted are the Preamble and the First Amendment. Clearly, this text points

to God as the Prime Mover behind the writing of the document, while at the same time praising those who assembled in Philadelphia as geniuses and very wise men.

A Beka's high-school treatment of the Convention and Constitution is not as bold in its pronouncements, but still praises the men and the results. It critiques the "bundle of compromises" interpretation as being too negative. Yes, there were compromises, but "therein lies the beauty of the document. Men from different sections of the country, with very different political, social, and economic interests, showed the discretion, courage, and wisdom to put aside enough local interests to provide a document that could be acceptable to people from all sections of the country and for all time." The Conventioners were more concerned with a permanent and strong union of the states. The key to their compromises was that they set aside local interests; they did not compromise on their principles. Their efforts assured that America would "become a nation of free men, with a strong government based upon sound Biblical principles, a government which recognized both man's rights and man's responsibilities." It then continues with a quote from James Madison, wherein he states that "there never was an assembly of men . . . who were more pure in their motives or more exclusively or anxiously devoted to the object committed to them to . . . best secure the permanent liberty and happiness of their country."

In a separate section called "The Constitution and How It Works," the first subsection is entitled "Our Revered Constitution." Quotes from James Wilson and Noah Webster are used to confirm that the Constitution truly is "one of the most revered documents in the history of freedom." While this text certainly upholds a special status for the Constitution, it does not merely state it, but attempts to amass proof of that

assertion from contemporaries of the document, one of whom—Madison—is often credited with the title “Father of the Constitution.”

*A Child's Story of America* calls the Constitution “the greatest state paper which man has ever formed.” It continues, “It is a great document because our founding fathers prayed to God for help and asked Him for wisdom to establish a just and fair government. God answered their prayers.” The Convention was a “wonderful body of statesmen” not often seen in the world. They worked hard, settled all their disputes, and gave us our “noble framework of government.” The book goes on to provide a nice summary of the branches of government and their individual responsibilities. There is one minor historical inaccuracy, however: when Franklin mentioned the hard time he had figuring out if the picture of half of the sun was rising or setting, the picture to which Franklin referred was on Washington’s chair, not on the wall behind his chair. The text gets that fact wrong. Unfortunately, little errors of fact can be found throughout this source.

The Bob Jones 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade history book has an entire section on the Constitution. It offers a running account of key dates at the Convention, telling what happened of significance on those dates. Included are many thought questions. In a discussion of George Mason’s comments against slavery, one section ends by saying, “Many others agreed with him. But they did not want to talk about it. Why do you think that was? What do you think of Mr. Mason’s words?” Again, when Franklin mentions that he finally concluded that the sun on the back of Washington’s chair was a rising, not a setting, sun, the text does not explain what that means, but simply asks, “What did he mean?” This approach is attempting to get the students thinking about the import of words rather than

simply telling them everything. Although obviously in favor of the writing of the Constitution, the text avoids “over-the-top” commentary.

The 11<sup>th</sup>-grade Bob Jones textbook shows great respect for the delegates at the Convention, but lets Jefferson be the one to praise them specifically, recalling his comment that it was an assembly of “demigods.” There is an entire section on constitutional principles. A sidebar on Washington, while positive about the man and his accomplishments, lets the student know that he was fully human: “There was, however, a man behind the marble image. . . . He fretted as any normal person would over the myriad problems of the new government. . . . Of course, he had weathered Valley Forge and bested the best in battle; so he and adversity were old friends.” The conclusion? “George Washington was not a perfect man, but he provides an enduring example of how a man’s character—what he is—shapes what he does. And in Washington’s case his integrity shaped the dimensions of the presidency and the direction of the nation.” The focus on character is to be expected in a Christian textbook.

Washington was the glue that held the Convention together, according to Gardner. “Most historians agree that it was Washington’s presence that kept the convention from coming apart at the seams,” she notes. “He remained impartial in the manner in which he presided,” she continues. “As deeply as he felt about the issues at hand, he denied himself, and would not enter into the floor debating. His genius was the ability to endure, to maintain his equilibrium in the midst of endless frustrations, disappointments, setbacks and defeats.” Gardner concludes, “His character commanded such respect that even though many of the delegates had a strong desire to simply give up and go home, none could walk out and leave him standing there.” She continues with a rather comprehensive

(for elementary level) discussion of the issues at the convention, a long quote of Franklin's request for prayers, and an overview of constitutional provisions, article by article.

Carson also has high praise for the Convention and the Constitution. He even devotes one major section just to the Convention itself. He asserts, "Of all the many important gatherings in this era of American political beginnings, the Constitutional Convention must be ranked as the most successful and the one with the greatest meaning for the future." The Constitution was "a major breakthrough in constitution making, even for a generation already practiced in drawing up such instruments." The Constitution, for Carson, was a culmination of several traditions: the British tradition of written rights and liberties; the colonial tradition of governments based on charters; the Judeo-Christian tradition of "appealing to the precise written word"; and the extension of natural law philosophy that brought about the concept of natural rights. His analysis recognizes the many strands that came together to form the Constitution.

### Slavery and the Civil War

These two subjects are arguably the most controversial of all, and also the ones in which one might expect to see some variance among the sources. Not all Christian writers and presses find Lincoln an attractive figure. Some might even sympathize more with the Southern position in the war. How, then, do these sources handle this potential powder keg?

The A Beka elementary book presents both positions on the slavery issue without assigning blame on either side. It concentrates instead on the growth of hatred between

the sections as the cause of the Civil War. Lincoln is treated sympathetically: he cared about the South, but was opposed to slavery; after he was assassinated, even the South began “to realize the friend they had in President Lincoln.” In a sidebar, the text calls Lincoln “truly one of the great men of all time.” John Wilkes Booth is described as a half-crazed actor who blamed Lincoln for the war, but nowhere is it mentioned that Booth was a supporter of the South. Reconstruction is passed over lightly, but special attention is given to two prominent blacks in the post-Civil War world—Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver.

In 11<sup>th</sup> grade, A Beka-educated students receive a quite balanced approach to the issue of slavery and the war that followed. Many bad effects on society are traced to slavery, particularly in the South, where the existence of slavery repelled skilled laborers and created greater class distinctions. William Lloyd Garrison’s radical abolitionism also generated many negative effects. So both the slaveholders and the abolitionists come under scrutiny. Lincoln is a hero who saved the union. “The life of Abraham Lincoln,” the text says, “illustrates better than perhaps that of any other hero, the qualities that have made America<sup>th</sup> great.” What qualities were those? Lincoln’s determination not to let poverty and the lack of a formal education keep him from succeeding. Further, “He never allowed the bitterness of the Civil War to make him a bitter man. He never displayed hatred toward the South. He was a man determined to stand for what he believed was right.” Nothing in the text claims that Lincoln was a Christian; it only goes as far as to say that he respected the Bible and quoted often from it. Yet, in the quest for balance, other sidebars deal with Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, addressing the Christian faith of both men.

Also included is a section on the effect of the war on Christianity in America. Although the war divided denominations, the horror of war led to revivals of the faith both in North and South. As the text notes, “Because war forces men to face death, it forces them to think upon spiritual matters.” In all, this text is quite fair to both sides while keeping the concerns of the Christian faith central to the narrative.

Slavery is almost a footnote in *A Child’s Story of America*. It is not mentioned for quite a while, although an entire section is devoted to the story of the Alamo. It does conclude that it was good that the union was saved and no longer had slavery, but spends more time talking about the issues of states’ rights and tariffs. While not openly advocating the Southern position, the issues upon which it tends to focus are primarily the issues raised by Southern partisans. An inordinate portion of the book—two entire chapters—is taken up by describing the battles of the war. Lincoln’s assassination is the result of the actions of a “wicked and foolish man.” “The whole country mourned this evil deed. In fact, even in his death, Lincoln began the slow process of healing the United States.”

Bob Jones’s 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade text presents an even-handed appraisal of the slavery issue, commenting that the Founders thought slavery would end naturally, but that the invention of the cotton gin changed that assessment later. There is an ongoing analysis of the number of slave states vs. free states, showing how Congress was caught in a precarious political balancing act. Positive actions for freeing slaves, such as the Underground Railroad, and harmful actions, such as the violence that erupted in radical abolitionism, are compared. Its description of the war is fact-based, as in the instance of a chart comparing the differences in the number of free people available to fight, the miles of

railroads, and the number of factories and firearms possessed by each side. As was the case with its discussion of the Constitution, the text asks leading questions to get the students thinking about the significance of the chart.

Slavery has existed throughout the ages, but the slave trade in blacks did not begin until the Middle Ages, and at the instigation of Muslims, notes the Bob Jones 11<sup>th</sup>-grade text in its sidebar on slavery. Americans later found it more and more difficult to reconcile slavery with the principles of their new government and their belief in the inalienable rights of man. It was easier for the Northern states to give up slavery because their economy was not built on the plantation system. Southerners' treatment of slaves varied: some were undeniably cruel to their slaves, but most treated them well enough because it was good business to do so. The book's conclusion regarding slavery? "The story of slavery in America is an excellent example of the far-reaching consequences of sin. The sin in this case was greed—greed on the part of African tribal leaders, on the part of slave traders, and on the part of slave owners, all of whom allowed their love for profit to outweigh their love for their fellow man." The blame applies to all of the above who profited from this enterprise.

Abolitionism is considered a controversial movement—much of the book's discussion of it focuses on William Lloyd Garrison and his tactics. The John Brown raid on Harper's Ferry figures prominently in the discussion, and the narrative does a good job explaining why the South was so affected by this particular incident. Slavery, by itself, did not cause the war; it was only one part of the equation, along with states' rights and each person's version of patriotism (Robert E. Lee could not fight against fellow Virginians). Sidebars on the faith of generals include Stonewall Jackson for the South and

Oliver O. Howard for the North. This is a clear attempt to be balanced. In addition, there is a highly sympathetic sidebar on Hiram Revels, the first black man to serve in the United States Senate.

Gardner's *Life in a Nation Divided* begins the discussion of the North-South split with an indictment of the South's greed and ignorance. She points out how Southern planters ignored sound advice on crop rotation and the avoidance of debt. "For the rich, it was often the lust for the finer things that caused them to keep borrowing." Because of this, "the wealth of the plantations had ceased to be in their soil, the mansions, or their fine furnishings. It was in the slaves." Thus, she is contributing a moral dimension to the discussion that others have not mentioned. Instead of focusing on slavery only as a moral issue, she expands the scope of the moral question, showing how other bad decisions made slavery more valuable to the plantation owners.

Her condemnation increases in a section entitled "Plantation Owners Create a Dream World." She says they "threw all their effort into creating a romance novel to live in. In reality, they were living in the Southern United States in the 1800s. Yet, they chose to live like lords and ladies of fourteenth century nobility." Further compounding the problem, "In this dream world an entire generation had grown up never having to work and spending all their time amusing themselves."

Gardner spends considerable space providing the background and details of the Compromise of 1850 and then has a fine section that offers a perspective on what different Christian denominations and groups were doing to abolish slavery. This is the best account of abolitionism to be found in any of the books surveyed. She then has an extensive treatment of the Kansas-Nebraska Act and a balanced narrative on the problems

experienced there. She does, however, show how John Brown and other radicals stepped outside the boundaries of legitimate protest with their actions, both in Kansas and at Harper's Ferry. One historical inaccuracy was found in the text: Daniel Webster is identified as the son of Noah Webster. This simply is not the case. While it is a minor point to the issues at hand, it is important, for credibility's sake, to be accurate in every fact presented.

In her discussion of secession and the Civil War, Gardner does take a more Southern position, arguing for the legitimacy of secession and focusing on events never mentioned in other texts—such as the Peace Congress that tried to derail secession. By the extensive quoting from Southern Secession Declarations, she seems to be making the point that slavery was not the real issue for the South; rather, states' rights was the primary motivation for the secession. This is the only text of all those surveyed that has the Southern position advocated this forcefully. Yet she still sees problems on both sides. Her conclusion overall: "Lincoln and others had made it clear the war was about preserving the Union. Jefferson Davis had made it clear the war was about the right of secession or States' Rights. God does not look at what is fair; He looks at what is just. The Union was unjust in some of its practices, the Confederacy unjust in some of its principles. They were both unjust in their pretense about humanity. Most of the people in the North would consider emancipation only if the slaves would be sent back to Africa. They did not consider them Americans and certainly not equals. The young nation had a lot to learn."

Carson's explanation of slavery begins with a fact-based account of how the plantation system worked. His conclusion about slavery is that it was unjust, but it was

understandable why Southerners wanted it, primarily for the profit they could make through the system. His discussion of abolitionism continues along the same vein, sharing basic facts, but he does finish this discussion with a link between this movement and bad Reconstruction policy. At times, Carson seems to exhibit a slight tilt toward the Southern position just by the choice of wording: “The North drove the South out of the union.” Neither does he mention in his discussion of Kansas the underhanded manner in which the Missourians formed a pro-slavery government in the Kansas territory. Yet he does say of both sides, “Feeling was outrunning reason.”

In his analysis of the war itself, he spends some time on the shift from what he considers a war run on principles to one operating primarily on the concept of total war, using Sherman’s march through Georgia as his example. There also is a well-nuanced discussion of whether the states or the people created the nation and whether there is a right to secession. He offers both viewpoints without taking a position himself.

### Business/Labor

The rise of big business after the Civil War brought an increase in goods and wealth throughout all of American society, while at the same time, it brought a backlash from those who felt they were not included in this prosperity. Historians who celebrate free markets and private enterprise see this era as largely beneficial, while others see it instead as a time of rapacious, unbridled capitalism that drove forward on the backs of poorly compensated workers. Again the question: how do these sources interpret this era?

Men such as Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller should be considered heroes, according to the A Beka 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade textbook. It then goes on to catalog the inventiveness of the era, celebrating entrepreneurship. Labor is not mentioned at all.

“The Triumph of Free Enterprise” is the title of the chapter in the 11<sup>th</sup>-grade version from the same press. The focus is on inventions and the men who risked their capital to develop new industries. There is a sidebar on the faith of J. P. Morgan, a discussion of the positives and negatives of big business, and a balanced treatment of the American Federation of Labor. The text says of Samuel Gompers that he had “a better understanding of human nature than many labor leaders. He opposed socialism and had no visionary dreams of a perfect society.” Gompers also “saw to it that the A.F. of L. did not become directly involved in politics or tied to any political party.” The discussion goes on to point out, though, that violence was a major feature of most unions. The basically pro-business position taken by the text is summarized thus: “By 1900, industrialization, made possible by hard work, inventiveness, political and economic freedom, and an abiding respect for the broad truths of the Bible, was making America a nation of prosperity and a nation respected as a leader among the powers of the world.” There is, therefore, a clear connection between the rise of business and Christianity.

For those who prefer a book that ignores most of the issues revolving around the rise of big business and the labor movement, *A Child's Story of America* is the right choice. While it has a chapter devoted entirely to inventions, which is important, it never discusses at all that these inventions played a key role in big businesses, nor how those businesses affected everyday life in America. Labor unions also do not exist in this account.

The opposite is true in the 4<sup>th</sup>-grade Bob Jones text. Here one will find not only a high regard for inventive genius (in particular, Edison and Carver), but a section discussing the differences between capitalism and socialism, a lesson on the Christian distinction between needs and wants, a section on child labor, and a treatment of the good and bad sides of unions. Capitalism is portrayed as consistent with a Biblical view of society; socialism is antithetical to that worldview. Christians are supposed to trust God for the things they need and not simply succumb to commercials that try to convince you that you “need” to buy something that is only a “want.” Workers had legitimate complaints and some positive changes were made, but students are informed that when unions got bigger, “the members refused to work if their requests were not answered.” Striking breaks a contract between worker and employer. The section then suggests that going to court would be a better way of dealing with such disagreements.

In high school, students studying the Bob Jones curriculum also receive instruction on the significance of the inventions of the era. When addressing the AFL, the text points out that the union’s opposition to child labor was not purely humanitarian; rather, it fought child labor because it depressed wages and made jobs for adults more scarce. There is a strong emphasis on the violence committed by labor unions, yet without ignoring the wrongs perpetrated by some owners. For instance, when discussing the 1894 Pullman strike, the policy of George Pullman in reducing wages while not reducing rents for his workers is identified as that which precipitated the strike. So, while very pro-business in orientation, the text does not gloss over unjust treatment of workers.

The most extensive coverage of this era, among the texts surveyed, is easily Carson’s. He begins with a fairly sophisticated discussion of the effects of the Civil War

on the growth of the economy, thereby not disconnecting one era from another. He also deals with the value of the tariffs imposed by the government, and other government actions in the economy. While he recognizes some benefits from these governmental actions, he shows that those same actions created problems: “On the matter of government involvement, it should be noted that the government actions described above, such as land grants and loans to some railroads, the protective tariff, national banks, issuance of Greenbacks, and others, were, in effect, government intervention in the economy.” Why is that bad? Carson continues, “While they promoted some kinds of economic development, such as rail transportation and manufacturing, they retarded others, such as foreign trade and water transport. Government intervention produces distortions in an economy, makes for uneven and often wasteful development, sets the stage for booms and busts, tends to enrich some and impoverish others.” In short, he calculates the positives and negatives and comes down heavily on the side of the negatives.

Clearly, Carson admires the business leaders of the time—Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Hill, in particular, and never refers to them as Robbers Barons. He devotes one section to the growth of collectivist thought in America, a growth he sees as detrimental to the nation. Some of this growth occurred, he asserts, through the labor movement, with some of its leaders using Marxian rhetoric about the solution to social problems. In his discussion of unions, Carson distinguishes between the radical and moderate types, yet notes that violence was inherent in most of them.

## New Deal/Great Society

FDR's New Deal and LBJ's Great Society will be considered together because the latter can be seen as a continuation and extension of the former. In both programs, the federal government became more active in trying to solve economic and social problems. How one views those efforts is indicative of how one views the entire last half of twentieth-century American history.

Not much can be deduced about the perspective from the elementary A Beka text. An explanation of the New Deal comprises only one paragraph; the only critique offered is that of government deficit spending, but without any specifics. The Great Society is not covered at all.

A Beka's high-school version does much better in its coverage, and its interpretation of both programs is consistent. Franklin Roosevelt is tied to Keynesian economic theory and practice—government pump-priming to create prosperity. This was not beneficial for the nation because it substituted economic security for economic freedom. Further, "Roosevelt and his 'Brain Trust' reinterpreted the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution to mean that the federal government should not only create the *conditions* for happiness and prosperity for the people, but now should actually *create* happiness and prosperity for the citizenry by providing federally guaranteed jobs, housing, income, and old-age pensions." This took America "a large step away from a constitutional republic based upon law toward a socialist democracy based upon total 'equality' for the masses."

Lyndon Johnson, meanwhile, through the Great Society, raised the hope that man had "come of age" and could now "eradicate all war, poverty, injustice, ignorance, and

disease.” These were utopian hopes “dashed in the jungles of Southeast Asia, on the streets of America’s inner cities, and on the country’s university campuses.” The dreams were crushed by reality. One positive from the era, though, was the stride made in civil rights for black Americans. The chapter includes a four-page listing of notable black Americans throughout American history, a list that does not omit liberal icons such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Thurgood Marshall.

*A Child’s Story of America* explains that the New Deal created jobs for people and gave them temporary help, but that a cost was involved: the Constitution often was violated in the process and people’s rights were taken away, although no examples are provided. The government also began a policy of spending money not backed with gold and silver, thus leading to inflation, a term that is defined as robbing people “because it makes the money that each citizen earns worth less in terms of buying power.” While the Vietnam War is mentioned later, there is no reference at all to the Great Society.

The 5<sup>th</sup>-grade book from Bob Jones begins its discussion of the New Deal by examining Roosevelt and honoring him for his fight against polio. It then gives a pretty straightforward account of a few New Deal programs, even pointing to some benefits. It concludes with a short critique: “Although the New Deal did some good for America, it also caused problems. To make the New Deal work, the government became more involved in the people’s private lives and businesses.” Some of the programs were challenged in court and declared unconstitutional. Also mentioned was deficit spending by the government. But there are no details to provide substance for this critique. Treatment of the Great Society era mentions only civil rights; nothing is offered on Great Society programs themselves.

In Bob Jones's 11<sup>th</sup>-grade account, the New Deal gets a decent amount of coverage, laying out both a narrative describing the programs and a critique of the programs. The description and the critique are offered separately, allowing a full explanation of the programs before analyzing them. The conclusion is that the measures of the New Deal did not solve the economic crisis of the Great Depression.

An even stronger statement is made about the Great Society. It is termed, on the whole, a failure. Johnson had both liberal and conservative critics. Liberals said he did not spend enough on his antipoverty programs. Conservatives said that the failure confirmed their ongoing argument that "government legislation and regulation are not sufficient to solve society's problems" and that ultimately "the individual is responsible for helping himself." A final comment draws students' attention to a Biblical analysis of the issue: "Christians, of course, recognize that the root of society's problems is sin; only when this root problem is dealt with can society's problems as a whole be approached."

The most comprehensive analysis of the New Deal, by far, is found in Carson's series. He considers FDR's policies the full-scale arrival of collectivism. "In one swoop, as it were, the government asserted authority over the economy and began its move toward assuming responsibility for the well-being of the population." The government had taken steps in this direction before, but none of those "could compare with the comprehensive change that came with the New Deal." Carson's critique also deals with the impossibility of planning an economy; to try to do so is to supplant the role of the market. One of his sidebars is H. L. Mencken's "Constitution for the New Deal," in which the satirist claims that all the powers of the government shall be vested in the hands of the President. He then has an entire section entitled "Evaluation of the New

Deal” that focuses on three areas: the political impact, the short-term economic effects, and the long-term economic effects. In dealing with the Great Society, Carson notes that FDR was LBJ’s hero, and that the Great Society merely expanded the concept of the welfare state begun by FDR.

### Communist Threat

Communism is typically seen as antithetical to Christian belief. Do the sources analyze it on those grounds only or do they offer a multifaceted critique? To be sure, none will consider it beneficial, but just how great a threat did it pose to America, particularly in the years immediately following World War II?

A Beka’s elementary text lists a point-by-point comparison of communism and “democracy.” Some points are: “The Communists believe that the people exist to help the government, while the democracies believe that the government exists to help the people” and “The Communist Party allows its people no freedom of choice, while a democracy abounds in freedom.” It also notes, “The Communist leaders are atheistic (they do not believe in God). They teach the children there is no God.” Fighting against communism in other countries will help protect America, but it must be understood that “there can never be true worldwide peace until Jesus Christ comes again.”

The 11<sup>th</sup>-grade text for A Beka has a subsection called “Communist Subversion” that mentions how members of the American Communist Party were convicted under the Smith Act and that tells of the passage of the Internal Security Act. It specifically notes the Alger Hiss-Whittaker Chambers controversy and the case of the Rosenbergs. There is even a quote from Chambers’s autobiography, *Witness*, that reveals why he broke from

the Communist Party. The text discusses Sen. Joe McCarthy, backing many of his charges, while recognizing some of his defects: “His sarcastic manner and his sometimes careless handling of facts assumed that those he investigated were guilty until proven innocent. McCarthy’s personality and his conduct before television cameras did not give him a good public image.”

For some reason, communism in *A Child’s Story of America* is treated entirely within the context of the Korean War. Its history of the end of the war is somewhat confused: “The Korean War lasted for three years. Finally, the North Korean leaders decided to remove their army from South Korea after General MacArthur invaded North Korea.” While it is true that MacArthur did invade North Korea, that did not signal the end of the war. U.N. troops were driven back below the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel after the Chinese entered the fray. MacArthur was recalled by President Truman long before this war ended. At best, giving all the benefit of the doubt one can muster, this is abbreviated history; at its worst, it is inaccurate.

When Bob Jones’s 5<sup>th</sup>-grade text handles the subject of communism, it focuses on McCarthy’s charges. The one-page sidebar called “Echoes in History” says that McCarthy was correct in some of his accusations, but violated the right to free speech, including freedom of political belief. The high-school text mentions Hiss-Chambers and treats McCarthy as someone who was unable to prove his contentions. Further, McCarthy’s methods unfortunately brought genuine anticommunism into disrepute.

Carson has a quite detailed account of atomic espionage and other government infiltration by communists. His coverage of the Cold War is better than the other sources. When he writes of McCarthy, he believes most of the Senator’s charges. While not

ignoring McCarthy's failings, he believes the real witch hunt was against the Senator. He comments, "Actually, as was proven by later investigations, there were a goodly number of people on the list [McCarthy's] whose loyalty to the United States was doubtful. . . . People with bulging records of pro-Communist activities and associations successfully weathered many departmental security hearings, only to be discharged or allowed to resign under fire later—after McCarthy's charges."

### Conclusion

After surveying the above texts, one can say that there is variety within a prescribed sphere. Clearly, all are Christian in their worldview. Carson, while not as explicit as the others, nevertheless promotes the religious tradition in America and the limited government/free market principles that are often connected with it. Some are more active in the promotion of the Christian worldview, but not one is bashful about proclaiming it.

The A Beka and Bob Jones texts are the most traditional, in terms of the classic textbook model. They tell the basic stories and add the Christian worldview where they believe it best fits. *A Child's Story of America* and Ellen Gardner's *Life in America* series are the most obvious in their attempt to integrate a Christian interpretation into history. The first, though, suffers what appear to be severe problems with historical accuracy and with wording that sometimes goes "over the top." Of all the books reviewed, this one has the least merit and cannot be included in the more positive comments to follow.

Gardner, meanwhile, although suffering some historical discrepancies, has the benefit of more extended treatments of the issues and a unique approach in explaining

them. Her attempt to use history as the backdrop for short lessons on science and other subjects is innovative and appealing. If some historical facts are corrected, the books have much to commend them.

In none of the books is Columbus a villain, seeking to commit genocide on native cultures. Most do point out his faults as well as his strengths. The same can be said of their coverage of all the subjects that were reviewed. Most offer balanced treatments of the significance of the Pilgrims to American history, the character of the Puritans and their Massachusetts experiment, and the value of the American Revolution and the Constitution. Even the highly controversial Civil War era, which might have displayed a more pronounced split between Northern and Southern partisan views, was handled well, showing the arguments of both sides. Even Gardner, who spends more time on the Southern position, giving it a sympathetic cast, goes to great pains to point out the character deficiencies of the South.

All praise free enterprise, and those that touch on the subject of labor unions do not hesitate to offer concern over the violence that has attached itself to the movement, while simultaneously talking about the wrongs sometimes committed by the owners of businesses. The New Deal and Great Society are part of the movement away from true constitutionalism and communism really was a threat to America, both from the outside and internally. There is basically one voice on these subjects.

What one does not see is extremism. All discussions of issues are argued in a civil manner. What one would hope to see, in a couple of cases, is greater historical accuracy, but the attempt to be balanced and provide both sides of the story, while still taking a definite position, predominates.