Data is probably outdated - yet the perspective and information presented is eye-opening a/oa

Siestas and Fiestas:

Images of Latin America in the United States History Textbooks

Patricia O'Connor Nancy J. Nystrom

Edited and published under the auspices of the Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs

Latin American Curriculum Aids
Roger Thayer Stone Center
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Tulane University
1985

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Patricia O'Connor and Gene S. Yeager Series Editors

"SIESTAS AND FIESTAS" : IMAGES OF LATIN AMERICA IN UNITED STATES HISTORY TEXTBOOKS

Textbooks have been called the backbone of the American educational process.² They provide a key source of instructional content for American school children and represent a major determinant in the formulation of social and cultural ideologies. While it is true that teachers today select from among a wide range of curricular aids, textbooks continue to be the main instructional mechanism for most teachers, often determining the how, the when, and the what of other curricular materials.³ Because teachers are at least to some extent dependent upon texts, it is important for them to feel confident that the material they use reflects a close approximation of the current state of knowledge in the field.

Recently, United States history textbooks have been the subject of particular scrutiny, and, like other texts, have been found to contain biases and inaccuracies, especially in their portrayal of topical events. Scholars have begun to investigate these texts' coverage of regions of the world assuming increasing prominence in U.S. foreign policy, finding the texts lacking in updated information and new interpretations of the role these regions have played in our nation's history. Latin America is one such region attracting scholars' attention, and at least one critic has found its coverage to be incomplete, if not one-sided. Other critics have said that textbooks convey that Latin America is important only as it is directly implicated in United States' economic and strategic interests and not as an intrinsically important region of the world.

For high school students today, such information obtained in U.S. history class may be their only academic exposure to Latin America and its diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties to the United States. The image promoted through these texts should be considered carefully: how does Latin America appear to the high school student of U.S. history? We undertook a study of history textbooks to determine if distortions existed in the presentation of material related to Latin America.

Other research has investigated the treatment in texts of specific social groups and areas of the world. Several studies have found that classroom textbooks in general perpetuate bias toward selected subgroups of the population in the United States. Other classroom materials--social studies textbooks, for example--have been shown to contain imbalances in their treatment of controversial material. One study demonstrated that many currently approved texts do not provide equal or fair representation of opposing sides of major issues. Regarding foreign policy, American government texts may provide the definitive intellectual encounter for older students, yet a look at those texts shows that foreign policy tends to receive scant mention (usually in the last chapter) and ethnocentric treatment.⁸ An analysis of United States history texts revealed similar phenomena among the texts' discussions of key topics concerning United States-Latin American foreign policy. Few included Latin American perspectives, failing "to reveal the hostility and distrust built up in Latin America towards the United States as a result of our policies there over the past century or more".9

In her critique of American history texts, Frances FitzGerald ¹⁰ cites the nationalism of these texts, proposing that they are used not to explore the past, but to tell children what their elders want them to know about their country. In the process of filtering relevant information about Latin America, textbook creators promote certain cultural stereotypes and lead students of American history to gauge the value of Latin American life according to some United States' standard. Still, most American history texts contain at least minimal references to Latin America, and several devote entire chapters to various topics such as the Spanish conquest and colonization or United States involvement in the Caribbean Basin during the first quarter of this century. Much of the information students may glean about Latin America is incomplete, however, thereby reinforcing many of the biases commonly held by North Americans about Latin Americans.

In his book, TREE OF HATE, Philip W. Powell¹¹ offers an insightful characterization of the hispanophobic fallacy that has permeated United States propaganda and perceptions about Spain and Latin America over the years.

Our national habit of condescension and oversimplification of virtually all phenomena of the Hispanic world is a habit that stretches from our elementary schools to our universities to the White House, and it grows out of ancestral antagonisms that have come to constitute a perennial prejudice as unjustifiable as it can be dangerous...It is a prejudice that defies correction, for it is pervasive among so many of the teachers, writers, and politicans

who guide our attitudes concerning Hispanic countries and their relationships to us. 12

Powell asserts that educational reform should openly attack the prejudicial treatment of Hispanic people and regions. Further, Powell suggests that the educational process should not attempt to fit Latin America into a United States pattern—that is, our brand of democracy and material achievement—if we hope to examine seriously and intelligently our relationships with the Hispanic world.

Powell is not alone in blaming the educational process for the perceptions North Americans develop about the role of the United States in world affairs. FitzGerald suggests that the dynamics of textbook production and revision influence the perpetuation of uni-dimensional world views. It would be naive to assume that textbook editors are always right in their judgment about historical content, says FitzGerald, since they have to keep costs low while simultaneously keeping pace with changing interests among educators. Frequently, the editors and publishers who update texts are more concerned with marketing issues than in searching for historical truths. In fact, Fitzgerald asserts,

texts are not written any more; they are, as the people in the industry say, "developed," and this process involves large numbers of people and many compromises. Not since the 1920s have

textbook publishers commissioned a basic history text from a single author and simply printed it, as they would a trade book. 14

Still, there has been some effort to include more comprehensive coverage of Latin American topics among post-1960 editions of American history texts. FitzGerald cites the trend toward including Latin America in discussions of pre-Columbian "America." Those textbook historians who continued to omit information on the Spanish colonizers committed a serious act of historical injustice, according to FitzGerald: "when they dropped the Spanish they dropped the whole history of Latin America". 15

If we accept FitzGerald's conclusions about the publication process, it appears that textbook production is based more on what will sell than on the quest for increasingly refined knowledge. Academics generally do not contribute significantly to changes in the content of the texts. Consequently, new scholarship trickles down slowly at best into the texts, with the time elapsed often reaching fifteen years or more. Although the revisions tend to follow changing political and educational philosophies, there appears to be no systematic process for identifying factual inaccuracies or for rectifying them. This study provides a basis for systematic and quantitative evaluation of one historical slant that may take some time to adjust: the image of Latin America that emanates from United States history texts.

We undertook this study with two purposes in mind. First, we documented the average amount of coverage the texts devoted to Latin America. We were

interested in comparing the coverage of Latin America to that of Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Soviet Union. At the same time, we wanted to compare the coverage of the various nations within the Latin American region. The second component of this study included a systematic analysis of fifteen events and policies to determine the amount of coverage, the main emphasis of presentations of events involving interplay between the United States and Latin America, and the quantity and nature of stereotyping in the presentations.

METHODS

Our primary interest in conducting this study was to determine general trends in the coverage and treatment of Latin American topics. We were not interested in the quality of coverage within specific textbooks. Therefore, we chose ten United States history textbooks currently approved for use in high schools in Louisiana (see Appendix A). Telephone interviews with five major publishers confirmed that these ten texts were high in sales throughout the United States. Seven of these texts were used in a study of United States' history texts' treatment of Hispanics, ¹⁷ and three were used in a qualitative study that assessed specific historical events in United States history for treatment of Latin American involvement. ¹⁸ The textbooks included in the study do not necessarily typify United States history texts currently used for instruction in high schools; only a carefully selected larger sample could guarantee representativeness. However, the ten books we chose do represent many of the major publishers and thus suffice to generate a grounded notion of

the coverage and treatment of Latin American issues in United States history textbooks.

In order to isolate significant indicators for the study of stereotypes, differential coverage, and emphasis, we developed and refined a data abstraction form (see Appendix B) that permits comparative analysis of different events and policies. From a list of more than fifty items, we selected ten major historical events and policies which the texts covered almost universally and then developed a method for comparing them statistically. While reading about these ten items in the texts we discovered there were some events, primarily from the post-1960s period, that were not treated in all the texts. Since other research had described these events as "key issues that should be studied about U.S. and Latin American relations, ¹⁹ we expanded our list to include the following fifteen events and policies:

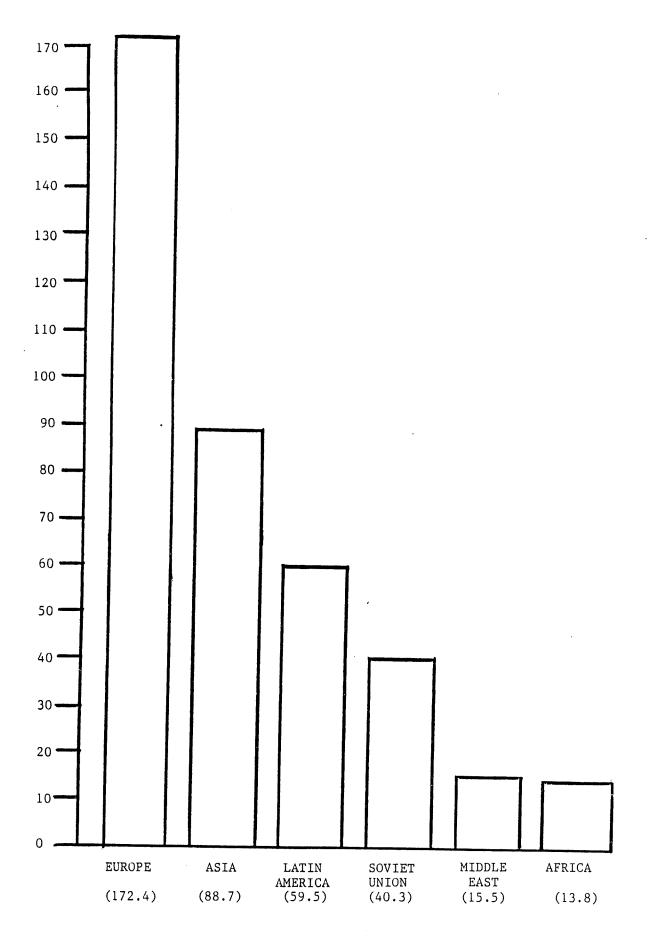
- 1. Preconquest and conquest of the Americas
- 2. Manifest Destiny
- 3. Monroe Doctrine
- 4. Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine
- 5. Panama Canal
- 6. Dollar Diplomacy
- 7. Wilson and the Mexican revolution
- 8. Good Neighbor Policy
- 9. Hispanic Immigration to the U.S. since 1950
- 10. Cuban Missile Crisis

- 11. Bay of Pigs
- 12. Alliance for Progress
- 13. Guatemala 1954
- 14. Dominican Republic 1963-1965
- 15. Chile 1970-1973

ANALYSIS

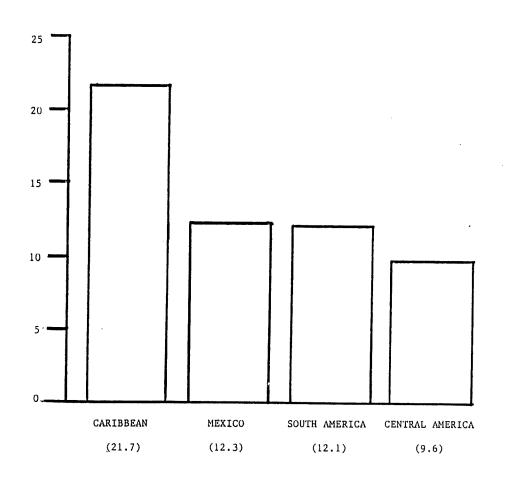
In order to compare the coverage of Latin America with other major world regions, we computed the average number of references to the regions found in the indices of the texts. We included two developed areas of the world: Europe and the Soviet Union. The Middle East, Africa, and the three less developed regions of Latin America were included, as was Asia, representing a region of both developed and less developed countries. We tallied the number of references to the regions themselves, as well as to the countries comprising the regions. On the average, Europe received the most coverage, Asia received the second most extensive coverage, Latin America the third, the Soviet Union the fourth, the Middle East fifth, and Africa sixth. Given that the extent of coverage ranges from 15 to 172 references, we can say that Latin America, with 60 references, receives comparatively wide coverage (see Table One).

Table 1. Average number of references to major world regions



To determine the coverage of Latin America by region, we computed the average amount of coverage given Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America. Table Two illustrates that there is little disparity in the average coverage of the four regions.

Table 2. Average number of references to Latin American regions.



Tables One and Two are useful in depicting the aggregate amount of coverage of the regions. In order to refine our analysis of coverage, we tallied the average number of sentences devoted to each Latin American country. We wanted to see how the coverage broke down by nation. Table Three provides an illustration of the results of this analysis.

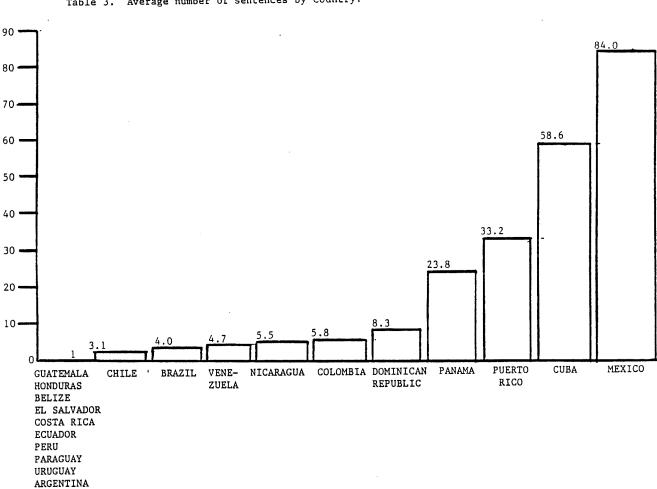


Table 3. Average number of sentences by country.

Of the twenty countries included, half received no coverage at all. Of the Central American region only Nicaragua and Panama were included in all ten texts. Only four countries of South America were included in all of the books. Our data suggest that the texts we studied are devoting much more coverage to Mexico and the Caribbean. This disparity of coverage may create among secondary school students a distorted image of the importance of the individual nations of Latin America. It is not surprising that Mexico, our closest neighbor, receives the most attention in these texts. But why does Cuba receive the second most extensive coverage? We hypothesize that Cuba has emerged as the point of departure for discussions of the threat of communism and Soviet influence in this hemisphere. Similarly, Vietnam receives disproportionately high coverage among Asian nations. In fact, Cuba and Vietnam receive comparable coverage, Cuba averaging almost 60 sentences and Vietnam about 40 sentences.

In order to examine in greater detail the quantity and quality of coverage of Latin America in these texts, we read and coded the texts' narratives describing the fifteen events and policies we had selected. In this case we were interested in the type of primary emphasis they were given: was the narrative focused principally on economic issues, or was the treatment of the event more military, diplomatic, cultural, or technological in nature? Where two emphases appeared to be given equal weight (the Monroe Doctrine portrayed as both a military and economic policy, for example), we coded a second emphasis. Table Four shows the predominance of military and economic treatment of historical events.

Table 4. Type of emphasis within selected events and policies.

EMPHASIS		TOTAL	%
Military		55	(41)
Economic		48	(36)
Cultural		15	(11)
Technological		2	(1)
Other		14	(11)
	TOTAL	134	(100)

The fact that U.S. history texts tell stories of military battles and their economic outcomes is not surprising. What is worthy of note, however, is the potential for biased interpretation proferred by these narrow portrayals of human events. We examined the same group of events and policies to see if the narratives contained language that could be considered prejudicial. Starting with a list of ten stereotypes which Beck and Anderson (23) found to pervade children's books on Central America, we added four additional stereotypes we felt were likely to exist in high school texts. The list of stereotypes included the following:

- 1. portrayal of Latins as lazy
- 2. portrayal of Latin America as backward
- 3. portrayal of Latin America as rural
- 4. emphasis on Latin American government corruption
- 5. emphasis on climatic features
- 6. emphasis on low educational level
- 7. emphasis on technological inferiority
- 8. emphasis on lack of cultural sophistication
- 9. emphasis on the lack of political sophisitcation
- 10.emphasis on the lack of economic sophistication
- 11.emphasis on the volatile character of Latin Americans' emotions
- 12.emphasis on the role of the United States as protector of the

region

- 13.emphasis on U.S. might and Latin American weakness
- 14.portrayal of the U.S. as a helper of Latin America

Our results show that stereotypes abound in the texts, but the predominant ones are not the ones found by Beck and Anderson. Although each of the fourteen stereotypes appeared in at least one text's rendition of under consideration, certain stereotypes consistently, and certain events were portrayed more frequently with stereotyped features. For example, four of the stereotypes which Beck and Anderson identified were the portrayal of Latins as lazy, backward, rural, or predisposed "fate" of a climate that them suffering from underdevelopment. We found these stereotypes to occur rarely (once or twice) in our readings of the narratives.

Other variables appeared more consistently, however. In all of the narratives we read (a total of 123), ten unbalanced references to the United States' strength appeared. In referring to the settling of Texas, for example, one book²⁴ cited twice the "weakness" of Mexico as compared to the Texans' "gallant,...brave" defense of the Alamo. Eight of the accounts contained references to Latin American government corruption,²⁵ and nine portrayed these countries as lacking in political sophistication. Seven of the ten books contained all of the stereotypes at least once. Only one of the texts contained none of these stereotypes for the fifteen events and policies we analyzed.

The two most widely stereotyped events were the portrayals of President Wilson's nonrecognition of the Huerta government in Mexico from 1913-1914 and the addition of the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. Ten references

to Latin American governments' emotional volatility were found to occur in explications of historical events, three of which occurred in the discussions of Wilson and Mexico. One book described Wilson's Mexico policy by using such statements as "Mexico was angry."²⁶ Another book characterized "Wilson's policy of watchful waiting" by explaining that "Huerta had risen to power as a result of a cold-blooded murder," while the account of Americans' reactions to the same events characterized them as "deeply troubled" or "dismayed".²⁷ Another text explained that "Wilson tried to impose his own solution on Mexico...But he was a sincere, dedicated friend of the Mexican Revolution."²⁸ It is not the number of these stereotypes that is striking, but the degree of bias: the U.S. as sincere and well-intentioned and Latin Americans as corrupt, unpredictable, and fiery.

In ten narratives, Latins were portrayed as lacking in economic sophistication. Five of these occurred in the accounts of Roosevelt's imposition of the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. One text explained that this policy was formulated when "the President told the nations of Europe that if intervention were necessary to collect debts owed by Latin American countries, the U.S. would be the country to intervene." Another focused on the Latins' inability to police themselves, stating that Roosevelt promised to send troops to any country that "could not keep law and order." These disparate accounts have in common their bias toward the United States as a helper of its southern neighbors, a stereotype that appeared fifteen times in the narratives. A related notion, that of U.S. concern for Latin America stemming largely from an interest in using Latin America for U.S.

defense, occurred twelve times in the narratives. These depictions leave students of American history with an impression of U.S.-Latin American relations characterized by North Americans' inherent strength and benevolence in assisting its politically and economically unsophisticated neighbors to the south. It may be inferred that the United States operates internationally from an implicit policy formed by our altruism in recognizing Latin American dysfunction without our help, combined with a pragmatic recognition of Latin American usefulness in U.S. defense.

It may be seen from this analysis that treatment of Latin American issues in these texts includes some biases worthy of further investigation. Without critiquing individual texts, or laying blame on any one component of the publication process, we have shown that there is some basis for the claim that Latin American topics receive less than adequate coverage. Certainly, the types of stereotypes conveyed to high school students have changed over the years: less frequently are Latin Americans the victims of the gross cultural caricatures appearing in earlier texts. However, as Latin America assumes increasing prominence in U.S. foreign affairs, students of United States history should be able to find in their texts a perspective that reflects the state of our developing knowledge of this area of the world. Both the historical content and the tone of the writing should prepare students to understand and evaluate the complexity of current events. The analyses and examples presented here provide some indication of the distorted image currently conveyed; acknowledging these inadequacies should stimulate further discussion on the part of all those concerned with the content of U.S. history texts.

NOTES

- In generalizing about the people of Latin America, Sidney Schwartz and John R. O'Connor (THE NEW EXPLORING OUR NATION'S HISTORY. New York, 1979) say that "most Latin Americans...take "siestas (afternoon rests or naps) and enjoy gay festivals called "fiestas."(p. 456).
- 2. Hillel Black, THE AMERICAN SCHOOLBOOK (New York, 1967).
- 3. M. Kirst and F. Wirt, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION (Berkeley, 1975).
- 4. Dan B. Fleming, "Latin America and the United States: What Do United States History Textbooks Tell Us?" THE SOCIAL STUDIES (July/August, 1982):168-171.
- 5. Rochelle Beck and Nancy Anderson, "Learning about Central America: What U.S. Children's Books and Texts Teach," prepared for the Council on Interracial Books for Children (New York, 1982):18,19.
- 6. See, for example, Jesus Garcia, "Hispanic Perspective: Textbooks and Other Curricular Materials," THE HISTORY TEACHER 14 (1980):105-20 and Carol J. Hopkins, "Representation of the Handicapped in Basal Readers," THE READING TEACHER 36:1 (1982):30-33.

- 7. Michael Kelly and Richard E. Gross, "Controversy and Social Studies Textbooks: A Model Code,"THE SOCIAL STUDIES 72:2 (1981):61-64.
- 8. Basil Karp, "Evaluating American Government Textbooks and Their Treatment of Global Issues, "CHANGE 13 (May/June, 1983):46-49.
- 9. Fleming, p. 171.
- 10. Frances FitzGerald, AMERICA REVISED: SCHOOLBOOKS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY (Boston, 1979), P. 47.
- 11. Philip Wayne Powell, TREE OF HATE: PROPAGANDA AND PREJUDICES AFFECTING UNITED STATES RELATIONS WITH THE HISPANIC WORLD (New York, 1971).
- 12. Powell, p. 163,4.
- 13. FitzGerald, p. 94-7. Also see "Frances FitzGerald Gives Her All (Also Her Always, Wholly, and Evermore)," SOCIAL EDUCATION 44:1 (1980) for a counter-argument.
- 14. Ibid., p. 22.
- 15. Ibid., p. 96-7.

- 16. Ibid., p.43.
- 17. Garcia selected his texts "on the basis of the ads in recent issues of SOCIAL EDUCATION AND SOCIAL STUDIES...and from publisher's promotional literature" (p. 108).
- 18. Fleming based his analysis on textbooks approved by the Virginia Board of Education and one additional text (p. 171).
- 19. Fleming, p. 169.
- 20. We included Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq in the Middle East. Other Middle Eastern countries were not mentioned in the texts.
- 21. All countries traditionally viewed as being in Africa, west and south of Egypt, were included.
- 22. Since the Soviet Union was the only one of these areas representing a single government, its position in fourth place is even more significant.
- 23. Rochelle Beck and Nancy Anderson, "Learning about Central America: What U.S. Children's Books and Texts Teach," prepared for the Council on Interracial Books for Children (New York, 1982).

- 24. Schwartz and O'Connor, p. 266.
- 25. For example, Arthur S. Link, et al., in THE AMERICAN PEOPLE: A HISTORY (Vol. 2, Arlington Heights, Illinois, 1981), discuss the Alliance for Progress: "Unfortunately, many of the governments to which the United States sent this aid were repressive dictatorships unpopular with their populations as a whole, and some were so corrupt that little American aid reached poor sectors of the population." (p. 936) Another account says, "Yet the people of Latin America disliked America's stepping into their affairs. They seemed to prefer their own governments, corrupt and weak as they might be, to honest and efficient administrations run by "norteamericanos" (Schwartz and O'Connor, p. 463).
- 26. Richard A. Bartlett, et al., FREEDOM'S TRAIL (Boston, 1981), p. 475.
- 27. Lewis Paul Todd, et al., A HISTORY OF OUR AMERICAN REPUBLIC (River Forest, Illinois, 1979). p. 418.
- 28. Link, et al., p. 649,50.
- 29. Todd, et al., p. 418.
- 30. Bartlett, et al., p. 475.

31. James P. Shenton, et al., in THESE UNITED STATES (Boston, 1981), describes the shift in power before the building of the Panama Canal: "Equipped with the Roosevelt Corollary and a naval base in Cuba, the United States was stepping into place as keeper of the peace in that part of the world" (p. 440).

APPENDIX A

Textbooks Surveyed

Bartlett, Richard A., Clair W. Keller, and Helen C. Carey, FREEDOM'S TRAIL. 3rd. edition. New York: Random House, 1974.

Bass, Herbert, George A. Billias, Emma Jones Lapsansky, Joseph H. Dempsey, Clara W. Mason, and Beth Millsten, OUR AMERICAN HERITAGE. Morriston, N.J.: Silver Burdett, 1979.

Drewry, Henry, Thomas H. O'Connor, and Frank Freidel, AMERICA IS. 2nd edition. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill.

Linden, Glenn M., Elizabeth A. Wassenich, Dean C. Brink, and Wessley J. Jones, Jr., A HISTORY OF OUR AMERICAN REPUBLIC. River Forest, Illinois: Laidlaw Brothers, 1979.

Link, Arthus S., Stanley Coben, Robert V. Remini, Douglas Greenberg, and Robert C. McMath, Jr. THE AMERICAN PEOPLE: A HISTORY. 2 vols. Arlington Heights, Illinois: AHM Publishing Corporation, 1981.

Madgic, Robert F., Stanley S. Seabery, Fred H. Stopsky, and Robert W. Winks, THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE. 7th edition. New York: Addison, Wesley, 1979.

Schwartz, Sidney, John R. O'Connor, Gerald Bagner, and Richard G. Gallin, EXPLORING OUR NATION'S HISTORY. 2nd edition. New York: Globe Book Company, 1979.

Shenton, James P., Judith R. Benson, Robert E. Jakoubek, THESE UNITED STATES. 2nd edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981.

Todd, Lewis Paul, Merle Curti, Elizabeth Connor, Peggy Webster Hays, Wesley Jones, Floyd B. Pitts, Franklin Smith, Maria Viramontes, and Richard Wilson, RISE OF THE AMERICAN NATION. 7th edition. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977.

Weinstein, Allen, and Frank Otto Gatell, FREEDOM AND CRISIS. 3rd edition. New York: Random House, 1974.

APPENDIX B

Data Abstraction Form

1.	Date Mo Da Ye	-	
2.	Coder Number		
3.	Title		
4.	Authors/Editor:	S	
5.	Book Number		
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44.	Spanish Louisiana		
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	b. list of names		
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	d. suggested readings specifically on	Latin America	
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13.	Stereotypes							
	a. portray	al of Latins as lazy		,	_			
	b. portray	val of Latins as backwar	rd		. yes		-	
	c. portray	al of Latin America as	rural		. yes			
	d. emphasi	s on government corrupt	·ion		. yes		-	
	e. emphasi	s on climatic features			. yes		***********	
	f. emphasi	s on low educational le	ve l		• yes			
	g. emphasi	s on technological infe	riority		. yes		-	
	h. emphasi	s on lack of political	.rioricy Sophisticat		· yes	2. no		
	-	Forrered	Coburactor	TO!! I	. yes	2. no		

i. j. k.	types, cor emphasis emphasis others	on	lack lack	of on	economic cultural	sophistication sophistication	yes yes	
								