

curricula are designed, it is common for several firms to produce volumes which they believe will stand a good chance of adoption. After the winner is chosen, the others have no alternative but to attempt to peddle their wares to other state and (more usually) local adoption committees in an attempt to recover their investment. Therefore, with an eye to this "escape route" for unsuccessful contenders, volumes designed for any state or local jurisdiction tend to be designed with the strong feelings or prejudices of every other jurisdiction borne in mind. I was told on several occasions that the textbooks tend to cater to the lowest common denominator, with all possible offending passages carefully screened out.

The point of the foregoing is that it is very questionable just how formative a part American textbooks play in school curricula. No doubt for practical reasons, small local areas may tailor their curricula with the available textbooks in mind. Larger areas which offer lucrative markets, however, appear to have considerably more influence on the publishers. In brief, the message which the above information holds for a project like this one is that, by and large, American schools appear to get the curriculum and textbooks that the local public bodies wish them to have.

It will be obvious that such a system is extremely sensitive to local political influence and even prejudice. Even at the state level, the comparatively few rigid curriculum directions given are issued by the state legislature rather than by the state department of education. Thus these directives also tend to be sensitive to political influence, and the entire question of affecting the curriculum becomes, in large part, one of affecting public and political appetite and pressure. The high degree of decentralization of control of curriculum merely compounds the problems. When all is said and done, a history or geography course must be viewed in the full knowledge that, in any case, it is likely to be an option for individual students -- a fact which brings the whole matter back to the question of public appetite.