

evident in recent weeks in Northern cities where rioters demonstrated conclusively that hate, horror, and swastikas are the wages of mis-education. Ironically, the largest white explosion occurred in Chicago which was founded before the Revolutionary War by a bold black man, Jean Baptiste Pointe Du Sable. Du Sable built the first house in Chicago and opened the first business there, but few people know his name. And it seems to me that a solution to our current crisis depends to a great extent on the opening of our minds and our textbooks to all the Du Sables and the excluded range of American life and culture that they personified.

From the standpoint of social utility and from the standpoint of truth, we are entitled to demand a balanced portrayal of American Negroes, particularly in history texts. With few exceptions, American history texts defame or ignore black Americans. To quote the authoritative study prepared by a group of California scholars: "The greatest defect in the textbooks we have examined is the virtual omission of the Negro . . . The Negro does not 'exist' in the books. The authors of the books must know that there are Negroes in America, and have been since 1619, but they evidently do not care to mention them too frequently." The California study went on to say that the "tone of a textbook is almost as important as anything it has to say. In their blandness and amoral optimism these books implicitly deny the obvious deprivation suffered by Negroes. In several places, they go further, implying approval for the suppression of Negroes or patronizing them as being unqualified for life in a free society."

As an author and as an EBONY MAGAZINE writer specializing in historical articles, I have examined over the last five years many textbooks now in use in American school systems. In most of the books I have examined, black Americans appear suddenly by a process of spontaneous generation. There is little or no material on the great African empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay; nor is there a relevant confrontation with the history of black and brown peoples before the explosion of Europe in the fifteenth century. Of equal importance, in the negative conditioning of black and white Americans, is the glossing over of the extraordinary complexity in the peopling and building of America. Contrary to the popular view, black people came to America long before the Mayflower. They were with the first French and Spanish explorers. They fought with Prescott on Bunker Hill, they were with Washington at Valley Forge, they were with Grant in Virginia. And if our history has any meaning Crispus Attucks, the hero of the Boston Massacre, and Salem Poor, a Bunker Hill hero, ought to appear on the pages of our textbooks as they appeared in the paintings and drawings of contemporaries.

With rare exceptions, American textbooks ignore free Negroes and present a rose-colored view of American slavery. We are asked to believe that, as a general rule, black men hugged their chains. We are presented a picture of fat, happy, docile slaves who were almost, as one text says, members of the family. Few authors explore the implications of the repeated slave revolts; few authors deal with the Underground Railroad or Negro abolitionists and rebels like Frederick Douglass, Denmark Vesey, and Harriet Tubman.

After the slave era, a white curtain of silence descends on Black Americans. We are told occasionally that black people are happy and that they are making progress. But care is taken lest we see them, and they seldom appear onstage to speak for themselves. There are few, if any, references to the nameless black men who helped to create the social wealth of the South and the black politicians who gave many Southern communities their first public school systems and their first welfare institutions. We are not told of the individual achievements of black men and women like Phillis Wheatley, the colonial poet who was the second American woman to write a book; Benjamin Banneker, the astronomer who helped to lay out Washington, D.C.; Jan Matzelinger who revolutionized the shoe industry by inventing a machine for attaching soles to shoes; and Charles Drew who helped perfect the blood plasma technique which has saved the lives of so many Americans, black and white.

The use of textbooks filled with half-truths, evasions and distortions is disastrous to both white and black Americans: to white Americans because one cannot know a great deal about America unless one knows a little about the Negro; to black Americans because personal health depends to a great extent on group self-esteem and because the spirit withers and dies if it is deprived of the opportunity to feed on the deeds of great men and the ideals of great movements.

In general, white-oriented textbooks tend to inoculate white Americans with the virus of racism, giving them a sense of exclusive identification with a land created by blood and sweat of men and women of all races and creeds. The