

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. 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 5 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 15th 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 their 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