

INTRODUCTION

A panel of six American historians, members of the History Department of the University of California, Berkeley, have been asked to review the American history textbooks that are most widely used in California from the standpoint of their treatment of Negroes. Attached are individual reports on the two state-adopted textbooks used in grade five, the three state-adopted textbooks used in grade eight, and the two high school textbooks reported to be most widely used in the state. These reports disclose an unhealthy condition in California education.

We are concerned first of all *as historians* that the history taught in our schools should accurately reflect the best findings of current scholarship. Professional scholars are aware that historical "truth" is an elusive quality. Well into the twentieth century professional scholars themselves were affected by the emotional aftermath of the Civil War, and there was a "Northern" and a "Southern" interpretation of such sensitive matters as slavery and Reconstruction. In the late nineteenth-century mood of national reconciliation, based on a widespread assumption of racial superiority among whites in both North and South, the "Southern" view tended to prevail; and the deference of textbook publishers to the special sensitivities of the Southern market has caused it to continue by and large to prevail in textbooks until this day. Meanwhile several generations of scholars, freer of sectional emotions and racist assumptions, through their researches and writings developed a substantially different understanding of many of these matters. Most of the textbooks we have examined reflect views on racial and sectional themes that have been rejected or drastically modified by the best of current historical scholarship.

We are additionally concerned *as citizens* because these historical distortions help perpetuate and intensify the pattern of racial discrimination which is one of our society's most serious problems. We are concerned not only because much of the material in these books is bad history, but additionally because it is a kind of bad history that reinforces notions among whites of their superiority and among Negroes of their inferiority.

Admittedly there is a danger in assessing historical writing in terms of its social consequences. A laudable desire to combat racism, and especially to bolster self-respect among Negro students, might result in exaggerating Negro contributions and the heroic qualities of Negro figures. In our view this would be an equal distortion of historical truth, and in the long run would fail to have the desired social effects.

We do feel, however, that the seriousness of the problem of racism underscores the textbook author's responsibility to portray the Negro's role in American life fully, accurately, and without either sentimentality or condescension. There should be a conscious effort to portray out-