

## SECTION 2

### History and the Shot

If it is difficult to be sure of the facts of the past, what is it that historians do when they write the history of a subject? What, indeed, is it that we call history? These are the central questions raised in this section. Since you have worked at reconstructing what happened at Lexington, what historians have said about that episode is here used as a case in point, but the subject of the section is history and historians, not Lexington.

#### A. LEXINGTON IN THE HANDS OF HISTORIANS

The following excerpts are drawn from the works of British and American historians. They are the products of men and women who have had time to research and consider the matters about which they write. They would, supposedly, be able to exercise greater insight and impartiality than those less well trained in the discipline of writing history. It is obvious, however, that controversies still exist.

In reading the documents in this section, keep in mind that it is more important to try to decide why each author writes as he does than to worry about who might be right. After examining and comparing the excerpts, what conclusions might one reach about what history is, and how historians write it? Is the task of writing history merely one of sifting through the evidence? Do we get closer to the truth about a past period as time passes?

1. Robert Bisset (1759-1805), an English schoolmaster, wrote a number of books on 18th century England. Throughout most of his life he was an ardent defender of the Tory cause. Tories valued the royal and aristocratic traditions of Great Britain and were greatly disturbed by the increasing insistence by their opponents, the Whigs, that such past traditions should be changed and that more people should have some say about how to live their lives. In 1796 Bisset published a massive, eight-volume study of the democratic states of ancient times. In those volumes he set out to prove that democracy is a vicious form of government and that a monarchy, supported by a strong aristocracy, is the only sane way to rule a country. In the following excerpt from a later book, Bisset describes what happened at Lexington:<sup>1</sup>

Colonel Smith, finding that their destination was suspected, if not discovered, ordered the light infantry to march with all possible despatch to

<sup>1</sup>Robert Bisset, *The History of the Reign of George III to the Termination of the Late War* (Philadelphia, Levie and Weaver, 1811), pp. 5-6.

secure the bridges and different roads beyond Concord; and to intercept the stores, should they be attempted to be moved. These companies about five in the morning reached Lexington, fifteen miles from Boston, where they saw a body of provincial militia assembled on a green near the road. The Americans, before this time, had disclaimed all design of attacking the king's troops, professed to take up arms only for the purpose of self-defence, and avoided skirmishes with the British soldiers; but on this day hostilities actually commenced, and here the first blood was shed in the contest between Britain and America. When the British troops approached, the Americans were questioned for what purpose they had met, and ordered to disperse; on which the colonists immediately retired in confusion. Several guns were then fired upon the king's soldiers from a stone wall and also from the meeting house and other buildings, by which one man was wounded, and a horse shot under major Pitcairn. Our soldiers returned the fire, killed some of the provincials, wounded others, and dispersed the rest. The Americans asserted, that the fire began on our side; and, besides endeavouring to establish the assertion by testimony, argued from probability; our light infantry consisted of six companies; the militia assembled at Lexington, of only one company; was it probable (they asked) that an inferior number of militia would attack a superior number of regular troops? To this the obvious answer is, the indiscretion of an alleged act is not a proof that it was not committed, nor is it sufficient to overturn positive evidence. The British officers who were present, gave the account which general Gage reported in his letters to government, that the Americans fired first; and on the testimony of several respectable gentlemen of unimpeached character, this assertion rests.

**2. William Belsham (1752-1827) was born and lived his life in England. As a staunch Whig, he belonged to the same political party as William Pitt and Edmund Burke, both of whom, at the time of the American Revolution, supported the American cause in the British Parliament. Belsham was a constant defender of liberal principles throughout a long writing career, authoring works in defense of the English Whigs, reform of the poor laws in England, religious liberty, the French Revolution, and many other liberal causes. Here he discusses Lexington in a multi-volume *History of Great Britain*, published in 1811:<sup>2</sup>**

General Gage having intelligence of a considerable magazine deposited at the town of Concord, about twenty miles distant from Boston, where the provincial congress was also held, detached, on the night preceding the 19th of April, 800 grenadiers and light infantry, under the command of Colonel Smith, who proceeded on their march with great silence: but by the firing of guns and ringing of bells they at length perceived themselves discovered; and on their arrival at Lexington, at five in the morning, they found the company of militia belonging to that place drawn up on the green; on which Major Pitcairn, who led the advanced guard, cried out, "Disperse, rebels! throw down your arms, and disperse!" This not being immediately complied with, he ordered the soldiers to fire; eight or ten of the provincials were killed, and the rest speedily retreated. The King's troops immediately marched on to Concord. . . .

<sup>2</sup>William Belsham, *History of Great Britain, 1688-1802* (London, Richard Phillips, 1811), VI, p. 144.

**3. William Lecky (1838-1903), an English historian and essayist, followed Bisset and Belsham by nearly three-quarters of a century. One of the towering figures of English letters in the 19th century, he wrote a magisterial, multi-volume work in celebration of the great theme of the rise of liberty among the Anglo-Saxon people. By his day, not only had the colonial patriots prospered in their own country, but the English Whigs, who had supported the colonials, had triumphed in England as well. Lecky felt both groups were clearly on the side of destiny. He mentions Lexington in passing in Volume IV of his history of England:<sup>3</sup>**

The road lay through the little village of Lexington, where, about five o'clock on the morning of the 19th, the advance guard of the British found a party of sixty or seventy armed volunteers drawn up to oppose them, on a green beside the road. They refused when summoned to disperse, and the English at once fired a volley, which killed or wounded sixteen of their number. The detachment then proceeded to Concord. . . .

**4. Winston Churchill (1874-1965), world statesman and writer, is best known as a commanding public figure of the 20th century. His writings, nonetheless, are in the grand manner of the 19th century men of letters, and he was not a trained professional historian. His mother was an American and he knew the United States well long before he and President Franklin D. Roosevelt jointly led the war-time alliance between the two nations in World War II. After the war he wrote a four-volume *History of the English-Speaking Peoples* hoping, as he wrote in his preface, to "not only fortify the English-speaking peoples of today, but also play some small part in uniting the whole world." His comments on Lexington follow:<sup>4</sup>**

At five o'clock in the morning the local militia of Lexington, seventy strong, formed up on the village green. As the sun rose the head of the British column, with three officers riding in front, came into view. The leading officer, brandishing his sword, shouted, "Disperse, you rebels, immediately!"

The militia commander ordered his men to disperse. The colonial committees were very anxious not to fire the first shot, and there were strict orders not to provoke open conflict with the British regulars. But in the confusion someone fired. A volley was returned. The ranks of the militia were thinned and there was a general *mêlée*. Brushing aside the survivors, the British column marched on to Concord.

**5. Peter Oliver (1713-1791) was, before the American Revolution, a prominent and wealthy political leader in the colony of Massachusetts. Once that struggle began, he became a staunch Tory, defending the British crown and its right to rule. In 1776 he left Boston for Canada and then continued on to England where he resided until his death. Writing in 1781, he was one of the first to try to detail the events of the colonial struggle against Great Britain.<sup>5</sup>**

<sup>3</sup>William E. Lecky, *A History of England in the Eighteenth Century* (London, Longmans, Green, 1892), IV, p. 201.

<sup>4</sup>Winston S. Churchill, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples: The Age of Revolution* (New York, Dodd, Mead, 1957), III, pp. 180-181. Also by permission of McClelland and Steward Ltd., Toronto, and Cassell & Co. Ltd., publishers of the Canadian and British editions respectively.

<sup>5</sup>Douglass Adair & John A. Schutz, eds., *Peter Oliver's Origin and Progress of the American Rebellion: A Tory View* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1961), p. 118. Reprinted by permission of the Henry E. Huntington Library.

In the Spring of 1775, the War began to redden. General Gage having Intelligence, that a Quantity of Warlike Stores were collected at Concord, about 20 Miles from Boston, judged it most prudent to seize them. Accordingly, just about Midnight of the 18th of April, he privately dispatched about 800 Men for that Purpose: they executed Part of their Orders, but to no important Effect. This Party was attacked by a Number, who had previously Notice of their March. Much Stress hath been laid upon, who fired the first Gun. This was immaterial, for as the civil Government had been resolved by the Suffolk Resolves, the military Power had a right to suppress all hostile Appearances. But in the present Case, the commanding Officer ordered the armed Rabble to disperse, upon which some of the armed Rabble returned an Answer from their loaded Muskets. The King's Troops then returned the fire. . . .

**6. Mercy Otis Warren (1728-1814), an American author, published her history of the revolution, "Interspersed with Biographical, Political, and Moral Observations," in 1805. Through her father, her brother, and her husband, she had close connections with important Massachusetts patriots, and with her pen she became one of the leading defenders of their cause as a writer of poems, plays, and historical works. Her insistence on the rights of women and her interest in political affairs would, doubtless, have led her to be called a "feminist" had she been writing in a later period. She commented on Lexington in her history of the American Revolution:<sup>6</sup>**

Few suspected there was a real intention to attack the defenceless peasants of Lexington, or to try the bravery of the surrounding villages. But it being reduced to a certainty, that a number of persons had, the evening before, in the environs of Cambridge, been insulted, abused, and stripped, by officers in British uniform; and that a considerable armament might be immediately expected in the vicinity, Captain Parker, who commanded a company of militia, ordered them to appear at beat of drum on the parade at Lexington, on the nineteenth. They accordingly obeyed, and were embodied before sunrise.

Colonel Smith, who commanded about eight hundred men, came suddenly upon them within a few minutes after, and accosting them in language very unbecoming an officer of his rank, he ordered them to lay down their arms, and disperse immediately. He illiberally branded them with the epithets of rebel and traitor; and before the little party had time, either to resist or to obey, he, with wanton precipitation, ordered his troops to fire. Eight men were killed on the spot; and, without any concern for his rashness, or little molestation from the inhabitants, Smith proceeded on his rout.

**7. George Bancroft (1800-1891) was one of the greatest American historians in the 19th century. After graduation from Harvard in 1817, he departed for Europe and two years of graduate study in Germany, where graduate training in the scholarly disciplines was just beginning. He returned to the United States as one of the first professionally trained historians in the country, and in due course began to publish a monumental *History of the United States*, which celebrated the development of American independence. In the meantime he ventured into party politics, became an ardent Jacksonian Democrat, and held numerous offices, including that of Secretary of the**

<sup>6</sup>Mercy Warren, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution* (Boston, E. Larkin, 1805), I, pp. 184-185.

**Navy under President James K. Polk. Bancroft's treatment of the Lexington affair appears in Volume VII of his History, published in 1858:**

The last stars were vanishing from night, when the foremost party, led by Pitcairn, a major of marines, was discovered, advancing quickly and in silence. Alarm guns were fired, and the drums beat, not a call to village husbandmen only, but the reveille to humanity. Less than seventy, perhaps less than sixty, obeyed the summons, and in sight of half as many boys and unarmed men, were paraded in two ranks, a few rods north of the meeting-house.

How often in that building had they, with renewed professions of their faith, looked up to God as the stay of their fathers, and the protector of their privileges! How often on that village green, hard by the burial place of their forefathers, had they pledged themselves to each other to combat manfully for their birthright inheritance of liberty! There they now stood side by side, under the provincial banner, with arms in their hands, silent and fearless, willing to fight for their privileges, scrupulous not to begin civil war, and as yet unsuspecting of immediate danger. The ground on which they trod was the altar of freedom, and they were to furnish its victims.

The British van, hearing the drum and the alarm guns, halted to load; the remaining companies came up; and at half an hour before sunrise, the advance party hurried forward at double quick time, almost upon a run, closely followed by the grenadiers. Pitcairn rode in front, and when within five or six rods of the minute men, cried out: "Disperse, ye villains, ye rebels, disperse; lay down your arms; why don't you lay down your arms and disperse?" The main part of the countrymen stood motionless in the ranks, witnesses against aggression; too few to resist, too brave to fly. At this Pitcairn discharged a pistol, and with a loud voice cried, "Fire." The order was instantly followed, first by a few guns, which did no execution, and then by a heavy, close, and deadly discharge of musketry.

In the disparity of numbers, the common was a field of murder, not of battle; Parker, therefore, ordered his men to disperse. Then, and not till then, did a few of them, on their own impulse, return the British fire. These random shots of fugitives or dying men did no harm, except that Pitcairn's horse was perhaps grazed, and a private of the tenth light infantry was touched slightly in the leg.

Jonas Parker, the strongest and best wrestler in Lexington, had promised never to run from British troops; and he kept his vow. A wound brought him on his knees. Having discharged his gun, he was preparing to load it again, when as sound a heart as ever throbbed for freedom was stilled by a bayonet, and he lay on the post which he took at the morning's drum beat. So fell Isaac Muzzey, and so died the aged Robert Munroe, the same who in 1758 had been an ensign at Louisburg. Jonathan Harrington, junior, was struck in front of his own house on the north of the common. His wife was at the window as he fell. With the blood gushing from his breast, he rose in her sight, tottered, fell again, then crawled on hands and knees toward his dwelling; she ran to meet him, but only reached him as he expired on their threshold. Caleb Harrington, who had gone into the meeting-house for powder, was shot as he came out. Samuel Hadley and John Brown were

<sup>7</sup>George Bancroft, *History of the United States, from the Discovery of the American Continent* (Boston, Little, Brown, 1858), VII, pp. 292-296.

pursued, and killed after they had left the green. Asahel Porter, of Woburn, who had been taken prisoner by the British on the march, endeavoring to escape, was shot within a few rods of the common.

Day came in all the beauty of an early spring. The trees were budding; the grass growing rankly a full month before the season; the blue bird and the robin gladdening the genial season, and calling forth the beams of the sun which on that morning shone with the warmth of summer; but distress and horror gathered over the inhabitants of the peaceful town. There on the green, lay in death the gray-haired and the young; the grassy field was red "with the innocent blood of their brethren slain," crying unto God for vengeance from the ground.

Seven of the men of Lexington were killed; nine wounded; a quarter part of those who stood in arms on the green. These are the village heroes, who were more than of noble blood, proving by their spirit that they were of a race divine. They gave their lives in testimony to the rights of mankind, bequeathing to their country an assurance of success in the mighty struggle which they began. Their names are had in grateful remembrance, and the expanding millions of their countrymen renew and multiply their praise from generation to generation. They fulfilled their duty not from the accidental impulse of the moment; their action was the slowly ripened fruit of Providence and of time. The light that led them on, was combined of rays from the whole history of the race; from the traditions of the Hebrews in the gray of the world's morning; from the heroes and sages of republican Greece and Rome; from the example of Him who laid down his life on the cross for the life of humanity; from the religious creed which proclaimed the divine presence in man, and on this truth as in a life-boat, floated the liberties of nations over the dark flood of the middle ages; from the customs of the Germans transmitted out of their forests to the councils of Saxon England; from the burning faith and courage of Martin Luther; from trust in the inevitable universality of God's sovereignty as taught by Paul of Tarsus, and Augustine, through Calvin and the divines of New England; from the avenging fierceness of the Puritans, who dashed down the mitre on the ruins of the throne; from the bold dissent and creative self assertion of the earliest emigrants to Massachusetts; from the statesmen who made, and the philosophers who expounded, the revolution of England; from the liberal spirit and analyzing inquisitiveness of the eighteenth century; from the cloud of witnesses of all the ages to the reality and the rightfulness of human freedom. All the centuries bowed themselves from the recesses of a past eternity to cheer in their sacrifice the lowly men who proved themselves worthy of their forerunners, and whose children rise up and call them blessed.

**8. One of the foremost historians of the United States in our own century was Charles A. Beard (1874-1948). A teacher and writer for most of his life, Beard came along at a time when historians, reflecting the intellectual currents of their day, were exploring various theories of grand forces that shaped the course of history. Beard viewed himself as a hard-headed realist, insisting that economic forces governed man's actions. When in 1928 he and his wife, who was also a historian, published their two-volume *Rise of American Civilization*, they had this to say:<sup>8</sup>**

<sup>8</sup>Charles A. and Mary R. Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (New York, Macmillan, 1928), I, pp. 231-232.

Tension between the metropolis and the colonies had now reached the danger point. Only a little act of violence was necessary to set the continent on fire; and the way for that fateful event was prepared by General Gage, in command of the British regulars in Boston. His superiors, the British ministers, chafing because the presence of soldiers had not awed the colonists into submission, were inclined to censure him for his inertia. At all events, for some reason, not very clear, Gage resolved upon a show of authority.

Hearing that the colonists had collected military stores at Concord, on April 19, 1775, he dispatched a small force to seize their supplies. News of the movement of troops, carried by Paul Revere and Rufus Dawes, spread like wildfire through the countryside, bringing swarms of minute men to the scene of action. At Lexington, on the road to Concord, the British encountered a small band of militiamen drawn up on the green, and an order to disperse was followed by firing. Whose hand kindled the flame is to this hour one of the mysteries of military romance: The Americans placed the responsibility upon Major Pitcairn commanding the regulars; the British laid the act at the door of the militiamen. The testimony is conflicting and historians still debate the question of the "war guilt." But the fact, stark and fateful, stands out against the fair spring morning at Lexington; the contest was then and there transferred from the forum to the battlefield.

**9. Willard M. Wallace (1911- ) is one of the generation of American historians that has come into prominence since the work of the Beards. Whereas the Beards' generation was heavily influenced by the economic and social crises of the 1920's and of the Great Depression that followed, the later generation knew a different set of experiences, among them World War II. After serving in the armed forces in that war, Wallace returned to civilian life, and in 1951 published a military history of the American Revolution entitled *Appeal to Arms*. Explaining in the preface why he wrote the book, he argues that military history had come to be overlooked, and laments the fact that, as another historian had written, "... history now occupies itself with economic and social conditions, and sometimes seems to regard happenings as mere accidents, to be allowed as little space as possible."<sup>9</sup> Of Lexington Wallace writes:<sup>10</sup>**

Pitcairn, whose advance guard had nearly captured the mounted Lexington scout, Thaddeus Bowman, became uneasy when the patrolling officers, on their way to Smith, mentioned that five hundred armed men were waiting in Lexington. The major resolved to take no chances. Halting his troops until Colonel Smith should come up, he had the men load their muskets. When this was done, he ordered them on no account to fire without orders. Then, with the main column by this time close behind, Pitcairn moved his troops into Lexington.

Word of the approaching ribbon of scarlet and steel was brought into the town by Bowman between daylight and sunrise. Instantly Captain Parker ordered guns fired and the drums beaten. As the men caught up their muskets and tumbled out of the inn or ran from their homes near by, Sergeant Monroe, recently released from his guard over Adams and Han-

<sup>9</sup>Willard M. Wallace, *Appeal to Arms* (New York, Harper, 1951), pp. vii, viii. Copyright 1951 by Willard M. Wallace. Reprinted by permission of Harper & Row, Publishers.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 17, 18, 20.

cock, who were now on their way to safety, formed the men in two ranks on the green. There were about seventy in the formation. With this handful Parker prepared to face the column of regulars now swinging toward him. Though there is no record of his having uttered the famous words attributed to him, "Don't fire unless fired on, but if they mean to have a war let it begin here," the thought could not have been entirely absent from his mind; else he must surely have hesitated to present his command to the overwhelming force drawing near. He may have had no intention of opposing the British unless insult should be offered, but surely he must have realized that the British could hardly regard an armed force on the green as other than a challenge to their right to pass.

At any rate, instead of swinging on to Concord and thereby exposing his flank to possible attack, Pitcairn marched his troops to the right past the meetinghouse, with its belfry at one side, and directly toward Parker. Accompanied by fellow officers, one of whom was probably Major Mitchel, Pitcairn galloped around the other side of the meetinghouse toward the minutemen. When he pulled up his horse near them, he ordered them to lay down their arms and disperse. Parker now saw that keeping his men in formation was utter folly, that assembling them in the manner and the place at that time had probably been a mistake, too. He had, therefore, no choice save to order his men to disperse and not to fire.

But Pitcairn had no intention that the Lexington company should withdraw with its arms. As he swung toward his troops to order them to disarm the minutemen, he thought he saw a flintlock from behind a stone wall flash in its powder pan. Several shots then followed and, an instant later, a smashing volley from each platoon. Pitcairn did his utmost to get the troops to cease firing, but there was no restraining them. Dashing forward, they completely scattered the already retiring farmers. Only a few of the latter returned the fire of the British. One man, however, stouthearted Jonas Parker, not only returned the fire but refused to budge from the line. Wounded by the British, he was in the act of reloading his musket when he died by a bayonet thrust. Altogether, eight Americans lost their lives and ten were wounded before Pitcairn and the company officers finally could get their excited men under control again and march them off, still huzzaing, toward Concord.

The question of who fired the first shot became at once a subject of bitter controversy. It has been variously ascribed, now to a Provincial firing from behind a stone wall or from a window in Buckman's Tavern, now to Pitcairn or to another Englishman, perhaps some nervous young officer whose pistol went off accidentally or whose finger became "trigger-happy" at the sight of Provincials defying king's troops. Pitcairn himself believed that he saw an American's gun off to one side flash without going off, followed by a number of shots, one ball wounding his own horse and a man near him. Yet one thing is quite certain from the mass of testimony analyzed so carefully by historians: Pitcairn did not give the order to fire; in fact, once the mischief was done, he tried to prevent even worse occurring. But regardless of who fired the first shot, men had died on the Lexington green by the action of British troops. Civil war had begun, and agitator Samuel Adams, hearing the fateful guns of Lexington from a distance of two miles, could lift his voice in full awareness of the significance of what was happening and say, "O! What a glorious morning is this!"



## B. IS THE TEXTBOOK HISTORY?

The following selections, discussing what happened at Lexington, are excerpts from textbooks used in junior and senior high school. As you read them, compare them with the materials you read in Part A, asking in what ways they appear to be similar and in what ways different. Can it be said that the writer of a textbook is writing history in the sense that the writers in the previous section were? Are these selections valid history, and in what sense if any?

### 1. *The Democratic Experience* by Louis B. Wright and other historians:<sup>11</sup>

When the First Continental Congress adjourned, its members agreed to meet again in the spring of 1775 if no action was forthcoming from Britain. Conditions failed to improve; in fact, they became worse. In Massachusetts "minutemen" were training to guard against possible actions by British Redcoats stationed in Boston; guns, powder, and other military stores were being collected at Concord. When on April 18, 1775, the British military governor sent out from Boston about 700 British regulars to destroy the stores at Concord, they were met by minutemen companies in Lexington and Concord. With minutemen swarming in from the countryside, the Redcoats faced unexpected hazards on their return to Boston. Before the day was spent, they suffered nearly 300 casualties and escaped total destruction only because reinforcements came from Boston.

### 2. *The History of a Free People* by Bragdon and McCutcheon:<sup>12</sup>

Hostilities between the Americans and the British broke out near Boston, which had been occupied in 1774 by a British army under General Thomas Gage. Early in the morning of April 19, 1775, a detachment of 700 British regulars was secretly sent from the city to destroy American military stores collected in Concord. Even though the minutemen had been alerted by William Dawes and Paul Revere, the British were at first successful. They easily dispersed a small force of Americans collected at Lexington.

### 3. *In The American Achievement* by R. C. Brown and others:<sup>13</sup>

General Gage knew that the citizens of Massachusetts had stored military supplies at Concord, twenty miles from Boston. On the night of April 18, 1775, about 700 British soldiers left Boston, marching toward Concord. But they did not leave unobserved, for the Sons of Liberty were watching. Paul Revere and William Dawes galloped ahead of them through the Massachusetts countryside, warning, "The British are coming!"

When British soldiers reached Lexington the next morning, they found about seventy minutemen assembled on the village green. Though the

<sup>11</sup>Louis B. Wright, et al., *The Democratic Experience: A Short History* (Chicago, Scott, Foresman, 1963), p. 34.

<sup>12</sup>H. W. Bragdon and S. P. McCutcheon, *The History of a Free People* (New York, Macmillan, 1967), p. 50.

<sup>13</sup>From *The American Achievement*, Richard C. Brown, William C. Lang, and Mary A. Wheeler, 64. (c) 1966, Silver Burdett Company. Used by permission.

minutemen were not blocking his troops, the British commander ordered them to disperse. The minutemen stood their ground, and shots were fired, leaving eight Americans dead and ten wounded. Faced by superior numbers, the minutemen then dispersed, and the redcoated British soldiers marched on to Concord.

**4. *Our Nation From Its Creation* by Platt and Drummond:<sup>14</sup>**

At Lexington, the British troops were met by a company of colonial militiamen, nicknamed *minutemen*. The colonial captain realized that, considering the greater numbers of British "redcoats," resistance would be futile. He therefore ordered his men to withdraw. But then a shot rang out. To this day, no one knows who fired this opening shot of the American Revolution. In the fighting that followed at Lexington, eight minutemen were killed and ten were wounded.

**5. *In Our American Republic* by Muzzey and Link:<sup>15</sup>**

Before the second Congress met, however, the clash of arms had come. The colonial militia had been training for several months. Bands of "minutemen" had been organized, ready to march at a minute's notice to meet any attack by the king's troops. Late in the night of April 18, 1775, Gage sent out a thousand men under Major Pitcairn to seize colonial supplies of powder at Concord, about twenty miles from Boston. But the patriots had learned of the plan. Paul Revere and William Dawes, riding by different routes, warned the countryside that the British were coming.

When Pitcairn reached Lexington, in the early dawn, he found a company of about seventy minutemen drawn up on the common to dispute his passage. He ordered the "rebels" to disperse. A shot was fired by some unknown soldier. It was the signal for a volley from the British, which killed eight of the minutemen.

**6. *The United States: Story of a Free People* by Samuel Steinberg:<sup>16</sup>**

In April 1775, General Gage, the military governor of Massachusetts, sent out a body of troops to take possession of military stores at Concord, a short distance from Boston. At Lexington, a handful of "embattled farmers," who had been tipped off by Paul Revere, barred the way. The "rebels" were ordered to disperse. They stood their ground. The English fired a volley of shots that killed eight patriots. It was not long before the swift-riding Paul Revere spread the news of this new atrocity to the neighboring colonies. The patriots of all of New England, although still a handful, were now ready to fight the English. Even in faraway North Carolina, patriots organized to resist them.

<sup>14</sup>N. Platt and M. J. Drummond, *Our Nation From Its Creation* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 74.

<sup>15</sup>D. S. Muzzey and A. S. Link, *Our American Republic* (Boston, Ginn, 1963), p. 78. Used with the permission of the publisher.

<sup>16</sup>Samuel Steinberg, *The United States: Story of a Free People* (Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 1963), p. 92. Copyright (c) 1954, 1958, 1963 by Allyn and Bacon, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Allyn and Bacon, Inc.

**7. Peter Schrag, a writer on education subjects, has taken a strong and controversial stand on the nature and validity of textbook history in an article that appeared in *Saturday Review* in 1967:<sup>17</sup>**

What is lacking in most critiques of history texts . . . is an examination of the concept of the textbook itself. For it is not simply the contents that go wrong, it is the tone. Take it from another masochist who has subjected himself to these volumes—history textbooks are bad, not because they are too biased, but because their biases are concealed by the tone. History texts are written as if their authors did not exist at all, as if they were simply the instruments of a heavenly intelligence transcribing official truths. The tone of the textbook is the tone of a disembodied voice speaking in passive sentences; it fosters the widespread confusion that the text *is* history, not simply a human construct composed of selected data, interpretations, and opinions. It is because all textbook authors feel compelled to write in the sterile syntax of the operating room that their products turn out to be so objectionable. How many of them ever confess that they—like the rest of us—operate with certain assumptions, that their conclusions have limitations, and that their subject matter is fascinating precisely because it is something less than revealed truth? How many of them are aware not only that the past shapes the present, but that the present—through historical interpretation—shapes the past?

It may, at one time, have been economically necessary to limit every class to a single volume which purported to “cover” the subject. Such a volume usually represented an ideological quotient verdict that avoided controversy wherever possible and that sought to please every prejudice in America. Where such evasion proved impossible, the book squirmed through a series of “on the one hand” and “on the other hand” statements that did nothing but betray the venality of its producers:

Senator (Joseph R.) McCarthy carried on extensive investigations of possible Communist influence in government. He brought charges against leading Americans no longer in government service, against the Department of State, and against the Army. Many Americans applauded McCarthy for his efforts, but others criticized him for what they called his recklessness and his disregard for constitutional rights.

What do the authors conclude? Have they no view? Why did some Americans applaud his efforts while others criticized him? What made McCarthy, and what destroyed him? Equivocation is demanded by the tone, by the pretension of infallibility, and the concomitant necessity to please all factions. It contributes nothing to the understanding of the subject, and it reduces the study of history to an emasculated shell.

Neither the nature of history (or any other field) nor the economics of producing and selling instructional materials requires the single text and the disembodied voice. There are no final arbiters in history; the truth lies in the honesty of the quest, and the excitement rests in the virility with which

<sup>17</sup>Peter Schrag, “The Emasculated Voice of the Textbook,” *Saturday Review* (January 21, 1967), p. 74. Copyright 1967 Saturday Review, Inc.

it is pursued. Thus almost every analysis which counts references—whether about Negroes or about patriotism—simply adds another element to the list of interests that must be appeased, altering the verdict, but not the idea that there is, after all, official truth. Education, like freedom itself, thrives on a diversity of views. It is, therefore, not the content of the history textbook that is un-American, but rather the idea itself.