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A DUBIOUS EXCEPTIONALISM: WHAT TEXAS CAN LEARN FROM THE WORLD HISTORY CURRICULUM STANDARDS OF NEARBY STATES

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Introduction

In a 2016 Baker Institute study of religion coverage in the Texas social studies curriculum, I noted “a general consensus among U.S. scholars that as the world becomes more interconnected and American society more religiously diverse, students need a basic working knowledge of the world’s religions.”¹ In succeeding years that consensus appears to have grown even stronger. In a 2017 supplement to the National Council of Social Studies framework for social studies state standards, religion scholars affirmed that the academic, non-devotional study of religion allows K-12 students to develop skills that “are invaluable in a society whose increasingly multicultural schools, workplaces, and local, national, and international public spheres all need informed, critical, and engaged citizens.”² And in 2019, a national summit on religion and education brought together experts from various disciplines to formulate action items for improving K-12 religious studies education across the United States.³

Nowhere is such improvement more required than in Texas. As I argue in that 2016 report, the Texas social studies curriculum standards (and the instructional materials adopted to implement them) do not give public school students the balanced coverage of religion they need to fully understand the world and function effectively in an increasingly diverse society.⁴ Much of this imbalance is traceable to the influence on the curriculum of Christian nationalism (also known as Christian Americanism), an ideology that claims that the United States is an essentially Christian nation in which the Bible should be normative for law and public policymaking.⁵ (Christian nationalists often refer to the U.S. as a “Judeo-Christian nation,” which typically means “biblical” in a conservative Christian sense, as it excludes the tradition of rabbinical thought that animates Judaism today.⁶) Members of the Texas State Board of Education (TXSBOE) are politically elected and are not required to possess any academic expertise in the subject matters they oversee. In 2009 and 2010, when the current social studies standards were developed, a bloc of Christian nationalist members dominated the board. Board members “passed over credentialed field specialists in favor of ideological allies with little or no relevant credentials,” and at times directly modified the curriculum standards to reflect Christian nationalist beliefs.⁷ By 2018, Christian nationalist influence on the board had diminished, and an interim effort to “streamline” the social studies standards rectified some of the problems discussed in my 2016 report; regrettably, however, much of the Christian nationalist bias, and resulting religious imbalance, remained.⁸

Now, however, the TXSBOE has an opportunity to revisit the issue of religion coverage in social studies. In 2021 and 2022, the board is scheduled to review and revise the existing curriculum standards—known as Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, or TEKS (pronounced *teeks*)—for public school social studies.⁹ (The review process will also need to incorporate recent state legislation aimed at prohibiting the teaching of critical race theory, as discussed later in this report.) The 2021-22 review process opens the possibility of correcting the deficiencies that plague the current social studies TEKS, thereby providing Texas students with an accurate and balanced account of the impact of major world religions on the course of human history globally.

What Texas Can Learn from the World History Curriculum Standards of Nearby States

In hopes of facilitating the board's TEKS review effort, the present report undertakes a limited comparison of the Texas social studies TEKS with equivalent curriculum standards from five nearby states: Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, and Oklahoma. Together with Texas, these states comprise the Southwestern Region of the American Academy of Religion (AAR).¹⁰ The purpose of the comparison is to identify lessons curriculum developers in Texas can learn from their counterparts in neighboring states. While it would certainly be instructive to compare the TEKS with the curriculum standards of large states such as New York and California, the six states in the current comparison are culturally more similar; they are all "red states" in which evangelical Protestants are the largest religious group.^{11,12} Thus there is an apples-to-apples aspect to the comparison.

This comparison is limited in two ways. First, in order to keep the study manageable, I focus on world history, the area of greatest concern in my 2016 report. Second, the comparison largely restricts itself to issues raised in that report: a one-sided stress on monotheism; questionable claims of "Judeo-Christian" origins for democracy; a Western, Christian slant; and the emphasis on terrorism in the treatment of Islam.

To briefly summarize the findings discussed below, religion coverage in world history standards from the nearby states is generally more balanced than that found in the Texas world history TEKS. Standards from the nearby states avoid the one-sided stress on monotheism and the Western, Christian slant found in the Texas world history TEKS; they make no claims of "Judeo-Christian" origins for democracy; and they address terrorism without deceptively tying this global problem to Islam. Additionally, in Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, and Missouri, students have greater opportunity than their Texas counterparts to learn about the role of religion in world history, as we will see in the next section.

Where World History Falls in the K-12 Curriculum

World history is not prioritized in Texas. There is some attention to the subject in Grade 6 social studies; however, that course focuses on the study of "people, places, and societies of the contemporary world."¹³ The only dedicated world history course is a one-credit high school elective, which encompasses the entire sweep of human history, from beginnings of recorded history through the contemporary period.¹⁴ To satisfy their social studies requirements, high school students may take either World History or World Geography, alongside required courses in U.S. government, economics, and post-1877 U.S. history.¹⁵

The situation is comparable in Oklahoma. While there is some attention to world history in middle school (in this case, Grades 6 and 7), the only course dedicated to world history is offered in high school. Covering beginnings of recorded history to the present, it is an elective that can partially satisfy social studies requirements for graduation.¹⁶

By contrast, in the other four nearby states, world history is offered in both middle school and high school. Arkansas Grade 6 World History spans beginnings through 1500 CE, while high school world history covers 1450 CE to the present.¹⁷ In Kansas, Grade 6 covers beginnings through the European Middle Ages; high school covers 1300 CE to the

What Texas Can Learn from the World History Curriculum Standards of Nearby States

present.¹⁸ Louisiana Grade 6 covers beginnings to the Age of Exploration; high school covers the 16th century to the present.¹⁹ In Missouri, Grades 6-8 cover world history prior to 1450 CE, and Grades 9-12 cover world history after 1450 CE.²⁰

Only Arkansas and Kansas appear to require that students take high school world history in order to graduate.²¹ Neither Louisiana nor Missouri specifies any such requirement in its respective high school graduation guidelines.²²

All in all, students in Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, and Missouri appear to have a greater opportunity to learn about the story of humankind, and the role religion plays in that story, than do their counterparts in Texas or Oklahoma. Furthermore, since high school students in Texas and Oklahoma may satisfy their social studies requirements with courses other than world history, it appears that some students in those two states may complete their public-school career without any exposure to that subject or religion's role in it.

One-Sided Stress on Monotheism

One characteristic that arguably distinguishes Judaism and Christianity—the two religions that supposedly make up the “Judeo-Christian tradition” touted by Christian nationalists—from many other world religions is their common belief in monotheism, the belief in one god. (Islam, of course, shares this feature, but Christian nationalists quite pointedly exclude it from the “Judeo-Christian tradition.”²³)

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that the Christian nationalist-inspired 2010 world history TEKS stress monotheism without a parallel mention of alternative theisms such as polytheism. One standard for the period 500 BCE to 600 CE required students to “describe the major political, religious/philosophical, and cultural influences of Persia, India, China, Israel, Greece, and Rome, *including the development of monotheism, Judaism, and Christianity*” (emphasis mine), the italicized phrase added at the behest of SBOE members.²⁴ The second instance required students to “describe the historical origins, central ideas, and spread of major religious and philosophical traditions, including Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, *and the development of monotheism*” (emphasis mine).²⁵

With regard to the first instance, a reasonably thorough discussion of religious/philosophical influences on ancient Israel, Greece, and Rome in the period in question would necessarily cover monotheism, Judaism, and Christianity. The rubric seems designed mainly to stress the Christian nationalist belief that the “Judeo-Christian tradition” is central to human history.²⁶

While a subsequent streamlining effort removed that first monotheism reference in the world history TEKS, it made the second reference more prominent by moving it out of the discussion of major religions and making it a separate standard: “describe the historical origins and central ideas in the development of monotheism.”²⁷ The effect is to slight polytheistic traditions, which have also played a major role in world history (for instance,

What Texas Can Learn from the World History Curriculum Standards of Nearby States

in South Asia and China), and to suggest that monotheism is somehow more important to world history than other theisms. It may also give the questionable impression that religion has “evolved” from “lower” forms like polytheism to “higher” or “superior” forms such as monotheistic Christianity.²⁸

Social studies guidelines from Kansas, Missouri, and Louisiana also treat monotheism as a focus of study but do so in a much more balanced manner than does Texas. In the Kansas standards for 6th Grade Ancient History, the unit on early river civilizations covers both polytheism and monotheism.²⁹ Similarly, in the discussion of early civilizations in Missouri Grades 6-8 World History, students are asked to “Explain the significance of monotheistic and polytheistic religions to the social and political order of early civilizations.”³⁰ While the rather skeletal Louisiana curriculum standards do not mention monotheism or polytheism, the sample scope and sequence documents for Grade 6 Social Studies mention both, and treat them in a more evenhanded manner than do the TEKS. For instance, the instructional task on monotheistic religions—in which students examine the origins, development, and similarities and differences of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam³¹—is balanced by discussions of polytheism in ancient Greece and Rome, as well as considerations of polytheism in Hinduism, including, laudably, a mention of the complexity of Hinduism’s polytheism (“the Hindu insight ... that the Oneness expresses itself in many different forms”).³²

As for Arkansas and Oklahoma, neither the standards for middle school social studies nor those for high school world history mention monotheism or polytheism.

Claims of “Judeo-Christian” Origins for Democracy

Another obstacle to religious balance in the high school world history TEKS, and an indicator of the lingering influence of Christian nationalist ideology on them, is a pair of standards that assert “Judeo-Christian” origins for democracy. These two standards were not significantly modified in the 2018 streamlining. The first requires students to “explain the development of democratic-republican government *from its beginnings in Judeo-Christian* [sic] *legal tradition* and classical Greece and Rome through the French Revolution” (emphasis mine).³³ The second standard requires students to “identify the origins of ideas regarding the right to a ‘trial by a jury of your peers’ and the concepts of ‘innocent until proven guilty’ and ‘equality before the law’ from sources *including the Judeo-Christian legal tradition* and in Greece and Rome” (emphasis mine).³⁴

It is significant that these claims about “Judeo-Christian” origins did not come from the panels drafting the TEKS but were added in response to feedback from SBOE members and reflect the Christian nationalist belief that American law and government are rooted in the Bible.³⁵ Such claims “do not reflect the views of major academic historians and legal scholars, and thus give students a one-sided and distorted account of current historical thinking. These standards also impede religious balance by stressing Christianity over non-Christian sources on the origins of democracy.”³⁶

What Texas Can Learn from the World History Curriculum Standards of Nearby States

The notion that U.S. democracy has “Judeo-Christian” origins is conspicuously absent in the world history standards for the other nearby states. The Arkansas standards for high school world history leave the sources of influence on democracy unspecified: they require students to “Analyze the social, economic, and political ideas that influenced the 18th and 19th century revolutions” and to “Analyze written documents that both articulate and contest the powers, responsibilities, and limits of a variety of governments over time.”³⁷

As for Kansas, the closest equivalent to the Texas TEKS in question is found in the upper-level U.S. Government course. In line with mainline scholarship, this standard highlights contributions from ancient Greece and Rome as well as the Enlightenment.³⁸ There is, however, also the less specific “Analyze social, economic, and political factors that influenced the Founding Fathers to limit the powers of government.”³⁹

The Louisiana curriculum zeroes in on Enlightenment influences, and covers world governments rather than U.S. government. The Louisiana standard for high school world history requires students to “Identify the key philosophers and ideologies of the Age of Enlightenment and explain their influence on world governments.”⁴⁰ The content associated with this standard in the world history scope and sequence document is the key question “How have Enlightenment philosophers and ideologies had lasting impacts on world government and society in general?”⁴¹

The Missouri standards for Grades 6-8 World History require students to “Explain how the rule of law developed from a written code of laws as well as concepts of separation of powers and checks and balances,” and to “Explain how concepts such as the rule of law, limited government, and due process are developed through the Magna Carta, and other influential documents.”⁴² In the Missouri standards for Grades 9-12 World History, students “analyze the key ideas of Enlightenment thinkers to explain the development of ideas such as natural law, natural rights, social contract, due process, and separation of powers.”⁴³

Finally, a standard for Oklahoma high school world history requires students to “Analyze the impact of the Enlightenment on modern government and economic institutions, including the theories of Hobbes, Locke, Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Adam Smith.”⁴⁴

In short, Texas is an outlier in claiming “Judeo-Christian” origins for democracy in its high school world history TEKS. The other nearby states either leave the origins unspecified or adopt a focus more in line with mainline scholarship—that is, on roots in ancient Greece and Rome and in Enlightenment thought.

A Western, Christian Slant

A third deficiency in the Texas world history TEKS is their overall Western, Christian slant. Indeed, during the 2018 streamlining process, one work group noted that “much of the TEKS ... weigh heavily in favor of Western and European civilization and history.”⁴⁵

What Texas Can Learn from the World History Curriculum Standards of Nearby States

Eurocentrism is particularly visible in the section of the TEKS on “traditional historical points of reference in world history.” In this section, standards covering the period 8000 BCE to 1450 CE discuss global developments (e.g., “the spread of major world religions and their impact on Asia, Africa, and Europe”); by contrast, the standards for the period 1450 to World War I are heavily weighted toward Europe: mentions of the Ottoman Empire and the Ming Dynasty are outweighed by discussions of European exploration and expansion, the Renaissance and Reformation, the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions, European imperialism, and the Enlightenment.⁴⁶ Similarly, a section of the TEKS covering the period 1750 to 1914 narrows the focus to Europe and the Americas, covering the American and French Revolutions, the Enlightenment, the Napoleonic Wars, and revolutions in Latin America.⁴⁷ This is not to say that the world history TEKS ignore the rest of the world; there are standards on the Maya, Inca, and Aztec civilizations, the civilizations of China and India, and “law and government in the Muslim world.”⁴⁸ Yet the overall discussion is heavy on Western developments and much lighter elsewhere.

A Christian-centric slant is equally visible in the world history TEKS. They require students to learn about Christianity’s major divisions (Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Protestantism), but not those of other major religions (for instance, the Sunni-Shia divide in Islam).⁴⁹ Whereas Islam and other world religions are discussed in the period prior to 1450 CE, they largely disappear from the TEKS covering the period 1450 to the 20th century (apart from Islam and terrorism, discussed below). Christianity, however, remains very much on the radar. For example, the coverage of the period 1450 to 1750 includes consideration of the “religious impact” of the Renaissance and Reformation, but not of religious developments elsewhere in the world during this period.⁵⁰ Subsequent world history TEKS mention the evangelical Christian William Wilberforce, Pope John Paul II, and Mother Teresa, and, inexplicably, list Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin as examples of individuals whose political philosophies students should be able to “explain.”⁵¹ (One wonders why Aquinas and Calvin are singled out and not, say, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali [d. 1111] or Ibn Khaldun [d. 1405], both of whom significantly influenced political theory in the Muslim world—or, for that matter, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani [1838-97], the “Father of Muslim nationalism,” and his disciple Muhammad Abduh [1849-1905], both of whom led efforts to reform and modernize Islam.⁵²)

The Arkansas standards for world history are far less Western- and Christian-centered than the Texas TEKS. In Grade 6 World History, for the period 300 CE–1000 CE, one standard focuses on the impact of the fall of the Roman Empire on Europe, with “rise of power of the Roman Catholic Church” given as an example.⁵³ This is balanced, however, by standards regarding other major world empires and civilizations, including African kingdoms, Muslim empires, Tang China, and the Maya civilization, and standards treating “key concepts and influences” of Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam.⁵⁴ In high school world history, a standard covering the period 1450-1770 requires students to analyze how “belief systems” as well as economic and political motivations “led to the exploration and expansion of empires”; another standard has students analyze the effects of “the expansion of empires in the Eastern and Western hemispheres” during this period.⁵⁵

What Texas Can Learn from the World History Curriculum Standards of Nearby States

Like the Arkansas standards, those from Kansas and Missouri are truly global in scope and do not overemphasize Christianity. The Kansas middle-level Ancient World History course (beginnings to 1300 CE) covers early river civilizations and those of the Mediterranean, Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, Southern Asia, East Asia, Central and South America, and Europe, as well as the religions associated with each.⁵⁶ Upper-level Modern World History: Renaissance to the Present takes a similarly global approach.⁵⁷ Missouri's world history coverage for Grades 6-8 requires students to "explain the origin, structure, spread, and significant beliefs" for both Christianity and Islam;⁵⁸ in Grades 9-12, students are asked to "Explain the causes and effects of the expansion of societies in Western Africa, Byzantine Empire, Gupta India, Chinese dynasties, and Muslim empires," and to "Analyze the historic development of Islam as well as the expansion of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism in order to explain their transformations and roles in conflict and cooperation."⁵⁹

As mentioned earlier, Oklahoma devotes Grade 6 social studies to the Western hemisphere and Grade 7 social studies to the Eastern hemisphere. Both grades include an examination of religion in the respective regions.⁶⁰ Oklahoma's high school world history is more Western-centric, with two sections of the standards devoted to Western civilization in the period 1400 CE–1900 CE.⁶¹ Yet even in these sections, there are references to the Chinese concept of the Mandate of Heaven as well as "the impact of Islamic learning" on European science and technology.⁶² For the period after 1900, the standards are far more global in focus; for instance, a standard on the "religious, ethnic, and political origins" of "modern genocide and conflicts" includes the Khmer Rouge, the Northern Ireland troubles, ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, Rwandan genocide, and the crisis in Darfur.⁶³

The Louisiana social standards for Grade 6 Social Studies are fairly balanced globally. There is a standard on the origin and spread of major world religions, and a standard on ancient Greece and Rome balanced by one on West African kingdoms and Chinese dynasties.⁶⁴ High school world history, however, is more Western-centric, focusing on the Renaissance, Reformation, European exploration, Enlightenment and European revolutions, and major European conflicts from 1600 to 1900. Nonetheless, there is a standard on "the rise and development of the European and Asian nation states" in the 17th through the early 20th centuries.⁶⁵

A survey of the overall sweep of history covered by the curriculum standards of the nearby states indicates that only the Louisiana and Oklahoma high school world history standards share, to some extent, the Western-centric and Christian-centric focus of the TEKS. Yet even these two states offer more balanced coverage than Texas.

Islamophobia and the Treatment of Terrorism

Alongside the privileging of Christianity, the world history TEKS reflect a deep-seated antipathy toward Islam. This is another mark of Christian nationalist influence, since that ideology is “intimately intertwined” with Islamophobia, as sociologists Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry point out.⁶⁶ The link between antipathy toward Islam and Christian nationalist privileging of Christianity was reflected in the 2010 world history TEKS in several ways:

Subtle differences in wording paint Christianity in bright tones and Islam in dark. For instance, an early draft of the TEKS described both Christianity and Islam as having a ‘unifying’ effect on their respective societies. However, the final draft changed the mention of Islam’s unifying role to a reference to Islam’s ‘impact.’ Thus what had been a positive portrayal of both Christianity and Islam became a positive portrayal of Christianity alone. Similarly, a standard on historical turning points from 600 CE–1450 CE mentions ‘the spread of Christianity.’ Then, instead of mentioning ‘the spread of Islam,’ it refers to ‘the development of the Islamic caliphates.’ This shifts the focus from the religion itself to its role in empire-building (and perhaps conjures up radical Islamist calls for a new caliphate).⁶⁷

Moreover, after the TXSBOE approved the 2010 social studies TEKS, members of the Christian nationalist bloc that then dominated the board claimed, without substantial evidence, to have uncovered “pro-Islam anti-Christian bias” in Texas textbooks.⁶⁸

Negative attitudes toward Islam persisted on the TXSBOE into the process of adopting social studies instructional materials in 2014. In the 2016 Baker Institute report, I describe the preferential treatment TXSBOE members gave to the anti-Muslim group Truth in Texas Textbooks (TTT) and its comments on the textbooks up for review. “A consistent theme in the TTT reviews of world geography and world history [instructional materials] was a one-sided and historically unjustified insistence on the violent nature of Islam.”⁶⁹

By 2018 the Christian nationalist bloc on the board had waned in numbers and influence, and the streamlining process corrected some anti-Islam features identified in my 2016 report.⁷⁰ Still, the 2018 update did not rectify another problem discussed in that report: a one-sided association between Islam and terrorism. In the world history TEKS for the period from 1450 CE to the 20th century, Islam largely disappears, only to resurface in association with terrorism. It is striking—and revealing—that Islam is the only religion specifically linked with terrorism in the TEKS, despite the fact that the phenomenon is found in other world religions, including Christianity.⁷¹

What Texas Can Learn from the World History Curriculum Standards of Nearby States

Indeed, the term “terrorism” appears in the current (i.e., post-streamlining) world history TEKS only four times, in each case in the phrase “radical Islamic terrorism.” In this instance the streamlining process only exacerbated a problem in the 2010 TEKS. Where the earlier TEKS referred to “the development of radical Islamic fundamentalism and the subsequent use of terrorism by some of its adherents,” the 2018 version replaces that with “the development and use of radical Islamic terrorism,” and then repeats “radical Islamic terrorism” three more times in this section of the TEKS.⁷²

Recent world history has undoubtedly been impacted by the rise of terrorist movements claiming to speak for Islam, such as Al Qaeda, ISIS, and Boko Haram, yet besides the fact that most Muslims worldwide disapprove of terrorism, it is misleading in the extreme to associate terrorism only with Islam.⁷³ Consider, for instance, the long history of violence committed by the avowedly Christian Ku Klux Klan, or Christian Identity follower Timothy McVeigh’s bombing of the Murrah building in Oklahoma City, or terror attacks committed in India by Hindu nationalist supporters of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).⁷⁴ Indeed, the decades just prior to the 2009-10 TEKS revision process saw terrorist attacks, often associated with conservative Christians, against abortion clinics and providers.⁷⁵ While these counterexamples may not have the global reach of Al Qaeda attacks, they demonstrate the fallacy of linking terrorism exclusively with Islam.

A much more balanced approach to terrorism can be found in the world history standards of four of the nearby states. (The relevant Missouri standards do not mention terrorism.) In the Arkansas high school standards, students “analyze short- and long-term causes and effects” of “terrorism” among several other factors in the period since 1945.⁷⁶ In the Kansas high school standards, students “analyze the causes and effects of ... the war on terror.”⁷⁷ Similarly, Louisiana high school world history standards require students to “Analyze terrorist movements in terms of their proliferation and political, economic, and social impact.”⁷⁸ In Oklahoma Grade 7 Social Studies, terrorism is listed as one of the “political, economic, and cultural forces” that “challenge contemporary political arrangements.”⁷⁹ Similarly neutral language appears in the Oklahoma high school world history standard regarding terrorism: “Analyze responses by world governments concerning the rise and impact of international terrorism and their responses to regional disputes such as Syria.”⁸⁰ None of these standards ties terrorism to Islam or any other religion. Indeed, Oklahoma offers an even more balanced approach in its high school U.S. history standards, by including the Oklahoma City bombing alongside Al Qaeda attacks.⁸¹

In short, standards on the study of terrorism from these four nearby states clearly show that it is possible to formulate standards that, unlike the Texas world history TEKS, do not one-sidedly associate terrorism with Islam or any other religious tradition.

Conclusion and Remaining Questions

As this admittedly limited comparison suggests, religion coverage in world history standards from nearby states is generally more balanced than that found in the Texas world history TEKS. Standards from the nearby states avoid the one-sided stress on monotheism and (with the partial exception of Louisiana and Oklahoma) the Western, Christian slant found in the Texas world history TEKS. They make no claims of “Judeo-Christian” origins for democracy, and they address terrorism without deceptively tying this global problem to Islam. Moreover, in Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, and Missouri, the role of religion in world history is more thoroughly integrated into the social studies curriculum, appearing in middle school as well as high school, rather than primarily in a high school elective, as in Texas and Oklahoma. Members of the TXSBOE and those tasked with reviewing and revising the current social studies TEKS would do well to learn from and emulate the example set by these nearby states.

Since the scope of this study was limited, several questions remain unaddressed.

- What structural and/or political factors account for these substantial differences between the TEKS and standards from nearby states?
- Are classroom teachers and academic subject-area experts more heavily involved in the process of developing curriculum standards in the nearby states than they are in Texas?
- What role do boards of education play in the development of social studies standards in these nearby states? Are board members able to directly modify curriculum standards, as they are in Texas? Must board members meet subject-area expertise requirements in order to serve?
- How does the coverage of religion in the world history standards from all six states measure up against the American Academy of Religion-approved guidelines for teaching religion in public schools, part of the National Council for the Social Studies “C3 Framework” for state social studies standards?⁸²

Another question deserving investigation is how recent Texas legislation aimed at preventing the teaching of critical race theory in public schools will impact religion coverage in the social studies TEKS. Texas House Bill 3979, which Gov. Greg Abbott signed into law in June of this year, stipulates that no instructor shall be *required* to discuss any “widely debated and controversial issue of public policy or social affairs”; instructors who *choose* to discuss such issues must strive to include “diverse and contending perspectives without giving deference to any one perspective.”⁸³ H.B. 3979 also directs the TXSBOE to develop social studies TEKS to cover several areas, including: “the fundamental moral, political, and intellectual foundations” of U.S. government; the history of Native Americans; and several types of documents, including the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Federalist Papers, the first Lincoln-Douglas debate, and writings of and about the Founders.⁸⁴ While H.B. 3979 does not explicitly target religion, it remains unclear how the changes in the TEKS resulting from the bill will impact the coverage of religion.

What Texas Can Learn from the World History Curriculum Standards of Nearby States

I plan to take up these and other questions in future research. In the meantime, I hope the TXSBOE will seize upon the current curriculum review process as an opportunity to correct the deficiencies that plague the current social studies TEKS. Texas students deserve a more accurate and balanced account of the role major world religions have played in our human story.

Endnotes

¹ David R. Brockman, “Religious Imbalance in the Texas Social Studies Curriculum: Analysis and Recommendations,” Baker Institute for Public Policy, October 6, 2016, 2, <http://www.bakerinstitute.org/research/religious-imbalance-texas-social-studies-curriculum/>.

² Jessica Blitzer et al., “The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History,” National Council for the Social Studies, revised June 2017, 93, <https://www.socialstudies.org/sites/default/files/2017/Jun/c3-framework-for-social-studies-rev0617.pdf>.

³ “A National Summit on Religion and Education,” Religious Freedom Center of the Freedom Forum Institute, September 27, 2019, https://www.religiousfreedomcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Publications_Edu_WhitePaper.pdf.

⁴ Brockman, “Religious Imbalance,” 22. In this report I also outlined criteria for achieving balance in religion coverage: Balance entails not a simple parity, but giving “each religious tradition coverage commensurate with its impact on a given social studies discipline”; coverage of religion should not overemphasize one religious tradition at the expense of others, and the information presented about each religion should be fair and accurate, giving an accurate and neutral account of a religion’s history (4-5).

⁵ Ibid., 8.

⁶ “Judeo-Christian” is by no means a neutral term: “[S]ince the 1980s the phrase has become ‘a badge of identity for Christian conservatives who wanted to chip away at the wall of separation between church and state.’” See Brockman, “Religious Imbalance,” 17; for further discussion, see *ibid.*, 42n.91. Rather than referring to two complementary religions, the notion of a “Judeo-Christian tradition” may have more to do with the victory of one religion (Christianity) over the other (Judaism)—something the vast majority of Jews would reject. As political scientist Stephen M. Feldman argues, “For Christians, the concept of a Judeo-Christian tradition comfortably suggests that Judaism progresses into Christianity—that Judaism is somehow completed in Christianity. The concept of a Judeo-Christian tradition flows from the Christian theology of supersession, whereby the Christian covenant (or Testament) with God supersedes the Jewish one. Christianity, according to this myth, reforms and replaces Judaism.” See Stephen M. Feldman, *Please Don't Wish Me a Merry Christmas: A Critical History of the Separation of Church and State* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 18.

⁷ See Brockman, “Religious Imbalance,” 5-6, 23.

⁸ For more information on religion coverage and the 2018 streamlining process, see David R. Brockman, “Despite Reversal on Hillary and Hellen Keller, ‘Christian Americanist’ Bias Remains in Texas Curriculum,” *Religion Dispatches*, November 19, 2018,

What Texas Can Learn from the World History Curriculum Standards of Nearby States

<https://religiondispatches.org/despite-reversal-on-hillary-and-hellen-keller-christian-americanist-bias-remains-in-texas-curriculum/>.

⁹ “TEKS and Instructional Materials Review and Adoption Schedule,” Texas Education Agency, April 2021, <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/teks-im-schedule.pdf>.

¹⁰ More precisely, only the eastern part of Kansas and the northwestern part of Missouri are contained within the Southwestern Region. See “AAR Regions,” American Academy of Religion, <https://www.aarweb.org/AARMBR/About-AAR-/Regions.aspx>.

¹¹ Donald J. Trump won the popular vote in all six states in 2020. David Wasserman et al., “2020 National Popular Vote Tracker,” The Cook Political Report, <https://cookpolitical.com/2020-national-popular-vote-tracker>. On evangelical Protestants, see “Religious Landscape Study,” Pew Research Center, 2014, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>.

¹² This is not to say that Christian nationalism is identical with evangelicalism. Sociologists Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry note: “While a large percentage of Christian nationalists are affiliated with evangelical Protestant denominations and hold characteristically evangelical beliefs, many non- evangelicals (or non- Christians, for that matter) also hold strong Christian nationalist beliefs. Conversely, many white evangelicals in surveys unequivocally reject Christian nationalism.” See Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

¹³ Texas Administrative Code, 19 TAC Chapter 113, §113.18 (a) (1).

¹⁴ 19 TAC Chapter 113, §113.42 (b) (2).

¹⁵ 19 TAC Part 2, Chapter 74, Subchapter B, Rule §74.12 (b) (4).

¹⁶ Oklahoma Statutes, 70 O.S. § 11-103.6 (OSCN 2021) (D) (4): “Social Studies – 3 units or sets of competencies, to consist of 1 unit or set of competencies of United States History, 1/2 to 1 unit or set of competencies of United States Government, 1/2 unit or set of competencies of Oklahoma History, and 1/2 to 1 unit or set of competencies which may include, but are not limited to, the following courses: a. World History, b. Geography, c. Economics, d. Anthropology, or e. other social studies courses with content and/or rigor equal to or above United States History, United States Government, and Oklahoma History.” I reached out to an official with the Oklahoma State Department of Education for clarification about world history requirements or lack thereof but did not receive a reply.

¹⁷ “Grades 5-6: Social Studies Curriculum Framework,” Arkansas Department of Education, revised 2014, <https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Offices/learning-services/curriculum-support/social-studies-standards-and-courses>; “World History Since 1450: Social Studies Curriculum Framework,” Arkansas Department of Education, revised 2014, <https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Offices/learning-services/curriculum-support/social-studies-standards-and-courses>.

¹⁸ “Kansas History, Government, and Social Studies Standards,” Kansas State Department of Education, March 10, 2020, <https://www.ksde.org/Agency/Division-of-Learning-Services/Career-Standards-and-Assessment-Services/Content-Area-F-L/History-Government-and-Social-Studies>.

¹⁹ “K-12 Student Standards for Social Studies,” Louisiana Department of Education, <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/academic-curriculum/standards---k-12-social-studies.pdf>.

²⁰ “6-12 Social Studies Grade Level Expectations,” Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Spring 2016, <https://dese.mo.gov/media/file/curr-mls-standards-ss-6-12-sboe-2016>. In an email message to this author, Dixie Johnson Grupe, Director of Social Studies with the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, stressed that subject matter content is largely a matter of local control in Missouri. While the state standards for social studies offer “broad, general statements about what a student should know and be able to do at the end of a grade level or course,” most decisions about curriculum, scope and sequence, materials, and instruction are made by local school districts, building on the foundations of the standards. This flexibility extends to the implementation of the world history standards. Grupe notes that though many districts offer a one-year world history course somewhere in Grades 6-8 and another somewhere in Grades 9-12, local districts may develop other options, including additional specialized and elective courses. Private email communication with Dixie Johnson Grupe, August 19, 2021.

²¹ “Arkansas Graduation Requirements,” Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, <https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Offices/learning-services/curriculum-support/arkansas-graduation-requirements>. The Kansas high school graduation requirements include “three units of history and government, *which shall include world history*; United States history; United States government, including the Constitution of the United States; concepts of economics and geography; and, except as otherwise provided in S.B.R. 91-31-32, a course of instruction in Kansas history and government” (emphasis mine). See “High School Graduation Requirements in Kansas,” Kansas State Department of Education, <https://www.ksde.org/Portals/0/CSAS/CSAS%20Home/Graduation%20and%20Schools%20of%20Choice/Graduation%20Requirements%20in%20Kansas.pdf?ver=2020-09-30-233432-950>.

²² “2020-2021 Louisiana High School Planning Guidebook: A Path to Prosperity for Every Student,” Louisiana Department of Education, May 19, 2020, https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/course-choice/high-school-planning-guidebook.pdf?sfvrsn=1fbd831f_54; “Graduation Requirements for Students in Missouri Public Schools,” Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, September 2019, <https://dese.mo.gov/media/pdf/graduation-requirements-1>.

²³ For instance, Family Research Council president Tony Perkins claimed that the U.S. is “a nation that was founded on Judeo-Christian principles, that’s the foundation of our nation, not Islam, but the Judeo-Christian God.” Similarly, evangelist Franklin Graham claimed that “The God of Islam is not the same God of the Christian or the Judeo-Christian faith. It is a different God, and I believe a very evil and a very wicked religion.” See Michael Sean Winters, “Mark Silk on the History of the Term ‘Judeo-Christian,’” *National Catholic Reporter*, April 15, 2019, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/distinctly-catholic/mark-silk-history-term-judeo-christian>.

²⁴ Brockman, “Religious Imbalance,” 15. This was TEKS 3(A) in the 2010 version. For comparison of standards, see “World History Studies, Crosswalk from 2010 TEKS to 2018 Streamlined TEKS,” Texas Education Agency, May 2019, 3, <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/World%20History%20Crosswalk.pdf>.

²⁵ TEKS 23(A) in the 2010 version. “World History Studies, Crosswalk,” 15.

²⁶ Brockman, “Despite Reversal.”

²⁷ TEKS 22(A). “World History Studies, Crosswalk,” Texas Education Agency, 20.

²⁸ The questionable notion that religion evolves from lower (animistic, polytheistic) to higher (monotheistic) forms has a long history within Christian thought. For example, the

What Texas Can Learn from the World History Curriculum Standards of Nearby States

German Christian theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher embraced such a view, placing Christianity (unsurprisingly) at the top of the evolutionary ladder. See David R. Brockman, *No Longer the Same: Religious Others and the Liberation of Christian Theology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 38-39.

²⁹ “Kansas History, Government, and Social Studies Standards,” Kansas State Department of Education, 95.

³⁰ “6-12 Social Studies Grade Level Expectations,” Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 34.

³¹ “Updated Social Studies Sample Scope and Sequence – Grade 6,” Louisiana Department of Education, revised Fall 2019, https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/scope-and-sequence/updated-social-studies-sample-scope-and-sequence-grade-6-word-version.docx?sfvrsn=95478flf_13, 175-76.

³² Ibid., 140, 170 (Ancient Greece and Rome); 218-19, 223-24 (Hinduism).

³³ TEKS 19(A) (20(A) in the 2010 version). “World History Studies, Crosswalk,” Texas Education Agency, 12.

³⁴ TEKS 21(B) (22(B) in the 2010 version). “World History Studies, Crosswalk,” Texas Education Agency, 14. Interestingly, the Grade 6 social studies TEKS do not contain this “Judeo-Christian” claim; instead, they require students to “identify historical origins of democratic forms of government such as Ancient Greece.” See TEKS 10(C), “Grade 6 Social Studies, Crosswalk from 2010 TEKS to 2018 Streamlined TEKS,” Texas Education Agency, May 2019, 7, <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Grade%206%20Social%20Studies%20Crosswalk.pdf>.

³⁵ Ibid., 17-18. The assertion of “Judeo-Christian” origins for U.S. democracy “is a common Christian Americanist tenet: for instance, former SBOE member and outspoken Christian Americanist Cynthia Dunbar contends, in her book *One Nation Under God: How the Left is Trying to Erase What Made us Great*, that the Constitution is based on ‘biblically-derived principles.’” See Brockman, “Despite Reversal.”

³⁶ Brockman, “Religious Imbalance,” 18.

³⁷ “World History Since 1450,” Arkansas Department of Education, 4.

³⁸ “Examine multiple points of view from a variety of Greek, Roman, and Enlightenment thinkers to discuss ways they influenced the formation of the United States government.” See PP.1.USG.1. “Kansas History, Government, and Social Studies Standards,” Kansas State Department of Education, 3.

³⁹ PP.2.USG.2. “Kansas History, Government, and Social Studies Standards,” Kansas State Department of Education, 4.

⁴⁰ WH.3.3. “K-12 Student Standards for Social Studies,” Louisiana Department of Education, 37.

⁴¹ “Social Studies Sample Scope and Sequence – World History,” Louisiana Department of Education, 3, https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/scope-and-sequence/social-studies-sample-scope-and-sequence---world-history.docx?sfvrsn=65468flf_3. However, in the Louisiana standards for a Civics course, there is standard C.1.4: “Explain the influence of Enlightenment philosophers, the Great Awakening, and the American Revolution on the American founding documents.” See “K-12 Student Standards for Social Studies,” Louisiana Department of Education, 29. The reference to the Great Awakening, a religious movement of the 1730s and 1740s in the

American colonies, could be interpreted as suggesting the “religious founding” claimed by Christian nationalists. However, the scope and sequence document associated with this course suggests that the state has a more nuanced approach in mind. See “Updated Social Studies Sample Scope and Sequence – Civics,” Louisiana Department of Education, https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/scope-and-sequence/social-studies-sample-scope-and-sequence---civics.docx?sfvrsn=c6478f1f_13. In a unit on “Influences on US Government,” “students investigate the Founding Fathers’ major historical, philosophical, and religious influences to better understand their decisions as they declared independence from Great Britain and began the work of creating the US government”; this includes the question of the roles played by “Enlightenment philosophical thinking and religion” (10). The nuanced nature of this examination lies in the fact that students “examine *multiple* sources to identify the religious influences behind the movement for independence” (37, emphasis mine). Students consider Romans 13:1-7 (on political authority), a sermon by 18th century Massachusetts preacher Jonathan Mayhew on that Romans passage, and Thomas Paine’s use of the Bible to make his case against monarchy in *Common Sense* (37-38). Yet the instructor is encouraged to underscore the influence of Deism and, in an exercise on the Declaration of Independence, to “[e]ncourage students to understand that the foundation of the Declaration’s statement of ‘self-evident’ truths is open to religious *and non-religious* interpretations” (38, emphasis mine). All in all, this is a fairly balanced treatment of the role of religion in Revolutionary-era America.

⁴² “6-12 Social Studies Grade Level Expectations,” Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 17, 19.

⁴³ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁴ WH.2.7. “Oklahoma Academic Standards for Social Studies,” Oklahoma State Department of Education, 67, <https://sde.ok.gov/sites/default/files/documents/files/Oklahoma%20Academic%20Standards%20for%20Social%20Studies%205.21.19.pdf>. Similarly, a standard for an Oklahoma course in U.S. Government requires students to “[s]ummarize the major documents contributing to the formation of constitutional government in the United States, including the Magna Carta, the Mayflower Compact and the English Bill of Rights.” See USG.2.1 in “Oklahoma Academic Standards for Social Studies,” 51.

⁴⁵ Brockman, “Despite Reversal.” The comment from the streamlining work group can be found in “Social Studies Streamlining Work Group A World History,” February 2018, 1, <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Social%20Studies%20TEKS%20Streamlining%20Work%20Group%20A%20World%20History.pdf>.

⁴⁶ TEKS 1(A)-1(F). “World History Studies, Crosswalk,” Texas Education Agency, 1-2.

⁴⁷ TEKS 9(A)-9(D). “World History Studies, Crosswalk,” Texas Education Agency, 6.

⁴⁸ TEKS 6(A), 6(B), 24(A), 24(D). “World History Studies, Crosswalk,” Texas Education Agency, 5, 16.

⁴⁹ Brockman, “Despite Reversal.”

⁵⁰ TEKS 5(A), 5(B). “World History Studies, Crosswalk,” Texas Education Agency, 4.

⁵¹ TEKS 20(C), 13(D), 23(B), 19(C), Texas Education Agency, “WORLD HISTORY STUDIES, CROSSWALK,” 8, 15, 13.

⁵² John L. Esposito, *Islam and Politics* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 30-31, 48-52.

What Texas Can Learn from the World History Curriculum Standards of Nearby States

⁵³ H.13.6.11. “Grades 5-6: Social Studies Curriculum Framework,” Arkansas Department of Education, 21.

⁵⁴ H.13.6.11, H.13.6.14. *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁵ Era6.1.WH.1, Era6.1.WH.3. “World History Since 1450,” Arkansas Department of Education, 3.

⁵⁶ “Kansas History, Government, and Social Studies Standards,” Kansas State Department of Education, 95-97.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 148-50.

⁵⁸ “6-12 Social Studies Grade Level Expectations,” Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 37-38.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 8, 34.

⁶⁰ 6.3.2, 7.3.3. “Oklahoma Academic Standards for Social Studies,” Oklahoma State Department of Education, 26, 28.

⁶¹ WH.2, WH.3. *Ibid.*, 66-67.

⁶² WH.2.5, WH2.6. *Ibid.*, 66.

⁶³ WH.5.7. *Ibid.*, 69.

⁶⁴ 6.2.6 (world religions); 6.2.4 (Greece), 6.2.5 (Rome), 6.2.7 (West Africa), 6.2.8 (China). “K-12 Student Standards for Social Studies,” Louisiana Department of Education, 8.

⁶⁵ WH.2.1 (Renaissance), WH.2.2 (Reformation), WH.2.4 (European exploration), WH.3.1-WH.3.5 (Enlightenment and European revolutions), WH.5.2 (major European conflicts), WH.5.1 (European and Asian nation states). “K-12 Student Standards for Social Studies,” Louisiana Department of Education, 36-37.

⁶⁶ Whitehead and Perry, *Taking America Back*, 154.

⁶⁷ David R. Brockman, “Raising foot soldiers for an imaginary holy war,” *Scalawag*, November 17, 2015, <https://scalawagmagazine.org/2015/11/raising-foot-soldiers-for-an-imaginary-holy-war/>.

⁶⁸ David R. Brockman, “6 Overlooked Takeaways From a Reviewer of Controversial Texas Textbooks,” *Religion Dispatches*, December 17, 2014, <https://religiondispatches.org/6-overlooked-takeaways-from-a-reviewer-of-controversial-texas-textbooks/>.

⁶⁹ Brockman, “Religious Imbalance,” 12.

⁷⁰ “TEKS 1(C) refers to ‘the spread of Christianity,’ but instead of also speaking of the spread of Islam, it refers to ‘the development of the Islamic caliphates and their impact on Asia, Africa, and Europe,’” and “TEKS 4(A) posits that Christianity was ‘a unifying social and political factor in medieval Europe and the Byzantine Empire,’ while referring only to Islam’s ‘impact’” (Brockman, “Religious Imbalance,”

16). The streamlined TEKS refer instead to “the spread of major religions” (1(C)) and a more neutral reference to Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy as “social and political factors” (4(A)). “World History Studies, Crosswalk,” Texas Education Agency, 1, 3.

⁷¹ Brockman, “Raising foot soldiers.”

⁷² TEKS 14, 14(A), 14(B), 14(C). “World History Studies, Crosswalk,” Texas Education Agency, 9.

⁷³ “Muslims around the world strongly reject violence in the name of Islam. Asked specifically about suicide bombing, clear majorities in most countries say such acts are rarely or never justified as a means of defending Islam from its enemies.” See “The World’s Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society,” Pew Research Center, April 30, 2013, <https://www.pewforum.org/2013/04/30/the-worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-overview/#extremism-widely-rejected>.

⁷⁴ On McVeigh’s links to Christian Identity, see Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 34-35. On BJP-related attacks, see Samanth Subramanian, “How Hindu supremacists are tearing India apart,” *The Guardian*, February 20, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/20/hindu-supremacists-nationalism-tearing-india-apart-modi-bjp-rss-jnu-attacks>.

⁷⁵ Mireille Jacobson and Heather Royer, “Aftershocks: The Impact of Clinic Violence on Abortion Services,” *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 3, no. 1 (January 2011): 220, <https://doi.org/10.1257/app.3.1.189>.

⁷⁶ “World History Since 1450,” Arkansas Department of Education, 6.

⁷⁷ “Kansas History, Government, and Social Studies Standards,” Kansas State Department of Education, 150.

⁷⁸ WH.7.6. “K-12 Student Standards for Social Studies,” Louisiana Department of Education, 38.

⁷⁹ WH.7.5.7. “Oklahoma Academic Standards for Social Studies,” Oklahoma State Department of Education, 30.

⁸⁰ WH.6.4. *Ibid.*, 69.

⁸¹ “Evaluate the rise of terrorism and its impact on the United States including the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building, the first attack on the World Trade Center Towers in 1993, the attacks on September 11, 2001, the USA PATRIOT Act, and the creation of the Department of Homeland Security.” See USH.8.6. “Oklahoma Academic Standards for Social Studies,” Oklahoma State Department of Education, 61.

⁸² Blitzer et al., “College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework,” 92-96.

⁸³ “Relating to the social studies curriculum in public schools,” H.B. 3979, 87th Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2021), <https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/87R/billtext/html/HB03979F.htm>.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*