Among the American people, the perception of the Second World War as the “good war” has persisted virtually unshaken for more than seven decades despite a plethora of scholarly literature criticizing and challenging this myth. While this continuity can be examined as a function of factors such as cultural depictions of the war and political pressure exerted by veterans’ interest groups, this piece argues, through an examination of pedagogical practices and a textbook survey contrasting treatments of area bombardment and the Japanese-American internment, that high school history curricula for decades have lacked a critical perspective on our conduct abroad during the war. This sanitized depiction of our wartime experience signifies a missed opportunity for students to develop critical thinking skills on an international scale through the lens of history; it represents a missed opportunity to prepare the leaders of tomorrow to thoughtfully consider our nation’s role today in a world transformed by the forces of globalization.

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EPIGRAPH
What did you learn in school today, little boy of mine?
What did you learn in school today, little boy of mine?
I learned that war is not so bad
I learned about the great ones that we have had
We fought in Germany and in France
And I am someday to get my chance
That’s what I learned in school today
That’s what I learned in school.
Excerpt from Tom Paxton’s song, “What Did You Learn in School Today?”,

- Studs Terkel’s oral history of the war, The Good War

Since World War II, the American public has displayed a proclivity for looking back upon the cataclysmic conflict through rose-tinted glasses. The war has been and continues to be celebrated as a golden age of American morality - in this narrative, once aroused from her isolationist slumber by the “treacherous” events of 7 December 1941, America rose as one, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or creed. She assumed her mantle of responsibility as protector of the free peoples of the world, and ultimately dispatched the hordes of evil incarnate on the field of battle in an efficient, effective, yet somehow equitable manner. This perspective has the potential to inhibit the American people from extrapolating lessons from their moral transgressions on the field of battle; even a democratic people fighting for a just cause can succumb to the brutality and hatred fostered within the context of a conflict, where mores typically implemented in the spirit of the Hobbesian social contract are no longer observed with such diligence as in peacetime.
“The Good War” Forever

MYTH VS. REALITY

Critical examinations of American conduct in the war and even works examining the myth of the “good war” at the scholarly level have long questioned this national schema. Two of the scrutinized events which most disrupt this dominant moral narrative are the Allied practices of area and incendiary bombing and the forced removal of Americans of Japanese descent (in addition to “enemy aliens”) to relocation centers which have been deemed “concentration camps” by many scholars.

Myth: The internment of more than 110,000 individuals of Japanese heritage, insofar as it represents the failure of Americans (including the Supreme Court itself) to abide by the Constitution on American soil has been characterized as the “nadir of Japanese-American history.” In the words of Tom Clark, an associate justice who served 18 years on the Supreme Court, the internment of both Nisei and Issei persons of Japanese ancestry represented “a sad day in our constitutional history.”

Real: Despite the unequivocal language of the Constitution of the United States that the writ of habeas corpus shall not be suspended, and despite the Fifth Amendment’s command that no person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, both of these constitutional safeguards were denied by military action under Executive Order 9066.

The Supreme Court did not subscribe to this logic, and instead found the internment to be constitutional in a series of rulings, including Korematsu v. United States.

THE HIGH SCHOOL TEXTBOOK: AMERICA’S ARBITER OF HISTORY?

Many have questioned the extent to which secondary textbooks define history and who in particular decides these definitions. Selden asserts that national history textbooks “provide authoritative narratives of the nation, delimit proper behavior of citizens, and outline the parameters of the national imagination.” Romanowski argues that these authoritative narratives, “in making judgements about what should be included and what should be excluded, and how particular episodes in history should be summarized [implicitly assert] a set of values [through their power to] assign positive or negative interpretations to particular events.” While he asserts that the textbook authors are the initiators of these interpretations, incidents such as the deriding and derailing of the Smithsonian’s initial plans for its Enola Gay exhibit in 1995 as “revisionist history,” and the more recent disparaging and abrogation of the College Board’s revisions to the AP US History framework as “indoctrinating kids[with] a negative view of American history” have demonstrated that the forces influencing and defining each textbook’s set of values are not the scholars who initially pen the works; they are instead the groups which oversee and influence textbook adoption, many of which are politically beholden, either directly or indirectly, to the people. In essence, recent events have demonstrated that the people wield just as much, if not more influence over the message of these history texts than the scholars who author them.

Furthermore, scholars have affirmed how high school history textbooks dominate classroom instruction—and as will be demonstrated here, beyond. Although teachers are indeed the gatekeepers to knowledge in the classroom setting, they are not only traditionally dependent on the textbook to set bounds on what information is relevant, but are also reliant on the text as their chief source of information, thus virtually constraining the breadth of information conveyed to students.
Considering the preeminent position of textbooks in high school history education, it is critical to note the finiteness of their educational impression. A 2015 report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that nearly 32% of high school graduates do not attend college following graduation, thus ending their history education. However, the remaining 68% are not necessarily guaranteed to continue their formal study of U.S. history. The 2015-16 iteration of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni's annual report on the state of core curriculums in universities across the nation, What Will They Learn?, disclosed that only 18.1% of “four-year public universities with a stated liberal arts mission as well as hundreds of private colleges and universities” require their students to complete a U.S. government or history course. When combined, these statistics form an imposing impression of the inherent finiteness of a high school textbook's influence; more than seven out of every eight students who graduated from American high schools in the spring of 2014 will never again be required to formally study U.S. history.

It is important to remain conscious of this “final say” text-books have in the average American's historical education as this work progresses. In preparing this text, I have consulted more than fifteen high school history texts, ranging in date of publication from 1947 to 2015. In the course of examining their depiction of the war, I will focus on their discussion of the two previously highlighted areas of weakness in the myth of the “good war”: the Allied practice of area bombardment and the internment of individuals of Japanese descent. This content analysis will shed considerable light on the continued authority of the “good war” narrative in American society.

TEXTBOOK TREATMENTS OF INCENDIARY BOMBING AND AREA BOMBARDMENT OF CITIES

Although Allied strategic bombing practices played an important role in destroying both German and Japanese industry and infrastructure, the effectiveness and morality of tactics such as the incendiary bombing of civilian populations and “morale bombing” of civilian have been hotly contested at the scholarly level of history. However, U.S. history textbooks have presented a significantly more sanitized narrative of the Army Air Forces' bombing offensives over Europe and Japan.

In The Development of America (1947), the earliest text examined in the production of this document, the Allied bombing campaign of Germany merits a small subsection; Wirth characterizes the air attacks as “making preparations for opening a second front in western Europe...[as] part of the ‘softening up’ process which prepared the way for the invasion.” The text omits any mention of either civilian targets or the practice of firebombing, and instead opts to list Essen, Bremen, Hamburg, and Hanover as some of “many important industrial centers” which “were severely damaged.” No estimate of civilian casualties is provided, excising their suffering from the text’s narrative of Allied bombers streaking across hostile skies to neutralize dots on a map. The campaigns against Tokyo and the other targeted Japanese cities are condensed into a small paragraph that represented the totality of the campaign as no more than “severe bombing of Japan.” Once again, no estimate of civilian casualties is forthcoming. In a continuation of this theme, Wirth also snuffed out discussion of damage caused by atomic bombing of Nagasaki by merely stating that “more than a third of the city’s industrial area was destroyed,” without any recognition of the city’s civilian victims.

Lewis Todd and Merle Curti’s 1950 book, America’s History, also avoids discussion of the civilian repercussions of strategic bombing, and altogether shirks discussion of intentionally targeting civilian populations. While the authors con-
cede that the RAF would sometimes “blanket attacks upon an entire industrial city,” they implicitly absolve the Americans of targeting civilians by asserting that “in general...[the Americans] undertook the job of pinpoint bombing, concentrating on a single factory or group of factories.” While this may not be wholly inaccurate as a generalization, it fails to discuss American raids—both incendiary and high explosive—on civilian populations. America’s History does offer discourse on the bombing of Japan, but it merely states, “Day by day the rapidly growing fleets of bombers dropped torrents of fire bombs and high explosives in devastating raids upon transportation, industrial, and military centers of the home islands.” Although Todd and Curti make a token mention of incendiary bombs, they carefully avoid all discussion of civilian casualties apart from those caused by the atomic bombs, which read in that case as more a demonstration of the bomb’s power (and America’s technological superiority) than as a consideration of the bomb’s target.

The first edition of The American Pageant: A History of the Republic (1956) was the first of a widely successful series of textbooks—the sixteenth edition of which was released in 2015. Despite Bailey’s inclusion of what would today be regarded as a racially discriminative tone (“The aggressive little men of Nippon, making hay while the Rising Sun shone, pushed relentlessly southward”), he offers little in terms of discussion of Allied bombing campaigns on either front. While the lone sentence about the bombing of Germany does acknowledge attacks “on cities, factories, and transportation arteries”, the sentence’s blustering diction (“Allied ‘blockbusters’, on an around-the-clock schedule, were falling like giant hailstones.”) shifts the reader’s reaction from a critical consideration of the targets to an admiration of the bombing itself. Similarly, the bombing of Japan is mentioned only as a benefit of island hopping; Guam and the Marianas are referred to as “unsinkable aircraft carriers...[from which] the first sustained air attacks were launched by giant bombers in November, 1944.” By reducing the massive Allied air campaign to a technological marvel in the case of “Allied blockbusters” in Europe, or a strategic marvel in the case of “unsinkable aircraft carriers,” the text displaces the narrative of bombardment from the suffering it caused, instead rendering thousands of deaths to yet another miracle of Allied strategic and productive superiority, likely shifting any classroom discussion away from the problem of targeting. An examination of both the 5th (1975) and 8th editions (1987) revealed that no significant changes had been made to this depiction of the Allied air campaigns.

The revised edition of United States History (1958), penned by Wirth, asserts that the “continuous day and night attacks by American and British aircraft...served many purposes,” such as “destroy[ing] everything of value to the Germans in making war” and “furnish[ing] direct help to the Russians who were steadily driving the Germans from Russian soil.” Wirth also echoes his earlier appraisal of the attacks’ great value in “softening up” western Europe.”

The 1961 textbook Rise of the American Nation also echoes the earlier sentiments of its authors, Todd and Curti—as well as those of every text examined to this point—by shying away from the topic of civilian casualties. This lack of a critical perspective—or even civilian casualty figures—continues in his treatment of the conventional bombing of Japan, to which he devoted one sentence, “The Japanese homeland was being methodically destroyed by repeated air attacks.”

Graff and Krout’s 1968 effort, the second edition of The Adventure of the American People, offers no deviation from what to that point had been an extremely sanitized narrative of area bombing in high school textbooks. Indeed,
The Adventure of the American People offers even less than its predecessors; the only sentence mentioning the Allied air campaign against the Germans declares, “The United States Air Force” soon after Pearl Harbor was flying with Britain’s Royal Air Force in massive strikes on “Fortress Europe”—as Hitler called the part of the continent under his control.” Although the discussion of the bombing of Japan does mention “industrial regions…in ruins…[and] cities…gutted by fire,” it is employed primarily to set up a comment on the Japanese race “doggedly hanging on,” refusing to surrender. Such a short, simplified narrative would likely fail to stimulate thoughtful discussion of area bombing beyond a facile circular discussion. Why was it necessary to bomb Japanese cities? To try to break their “dogged” resistance? What did America do to try to break the Japanese’s “dogged” resistance? They bombed Japanese cities.

The second edition of Freedom and Crisis: An American History (1978) fails to offer any significant discussion of either the Allied air campaign against Germany and the American bombings of Japan; only two sentences broach the topic, “Germany, as helpless now as Japan, was the target of massive air attacks. (Over 1,000 Allied planes participated in a single raid on Berlin),” scarcely acknowledging the massive strategic bombing campaign unleashed on Germany, and leaves the reader to simply infer that similar attacks took place against the Japanese homeland. The only other mention of the air campaign against Japan is visual — three dotted lines on a map of the Pacific denote “Allied air operations” against the Home Islands. For unknown reasons, such dotted lines marking “Allied air operations” are not present on the European campaign map in what can be interpreted as a circular justification of the decision to devote a mere two sentences to the topic of bombardment. If there were indeed no “Allied air operations” against Germany, it would in turn be unnecessary to consider area bombardment at length. In contrast to the near-complete omission of Allied air attacks, the Japanese assault on Pearl Harbor is entreated in a 16 page vignette.

The Challenge of Freedom (second edition, 1984) represents no change in the established pattern of glossing over the Allied air campaigns against Europe and Japan. The text primarily considers the bombing of Europe in relation to the Normandy invasion, saying, “In preparation of D day [sic], Allied bombers dropped tons of bombs on Germany and on German-occupied lands. In these raids, as in others throughout the war the American air force played an important part in weakening the Axis.” This represents no acknowledgement of civilian targets or casualties, thus stifling classroom discussion of the matter. However, even such a generalized, nonspecific take is superior to the one which Sobel et al. take on the bombing of Japan insofar as there is no mention of the air campaign against the Japanese islands. The third edition of the text (1990) changed no more than the typeface. Another 1984 text, Life and Liberty: An American History, takes a critical perspective on area bombing, but not that of the Allies. A photograph of forlorn refugees with a burning city in the background bears the caption, “Chinese in the city of Chungking, after a Japanese bombing attack, 1939.” Rosen et al. also indict the Germans for the Blitz, criticizing the German raids for “leav[ing] thousands of civilians dead and large portions of cities in ruins.” Supplementing this accusatory stance is a photograph of a British civilian sitting rubble, which is described as “an Englishman, returning home, finds his house bombed and his wife dead during the London blitz.” Such an empathetic discussion stands as a foil to the terse acknowledgment that “All the while, British and American bombers continued to pound German cities into rubble.” The lone sentence detailing the bombing raids against Japan concedes, “B-29 bombers now began raids on Tokyo and other Japanese cities, spreading death and destruction,” although the phrase “death and destruction” is likely deployed more for alliterative effect than with the intention of fostering discussion of the tactics employed by the Allied brass.

United States History: In the Course of Human Events (1997) delivers the first critical take on the Allied bombing campaign in Europe; it does so by outlining the Allied goals “to reduce German industrial capacity and weaken Germany’s will to fight,” and then recounts the difficulty with which the Allies tried to achieve these goals, elaborating, “The Allies eventually discovered that bombing specific targets, or pinpoint bombing, was difficult in daylight and impossible at night. So they began saturation bombing, or dropping bombs over a wide area.” Downey, Giese, and Metcalfe then inform the reader of the mixed results of the bombing campaign, penning, “The main effect was to kill German civilians (over a million perished), and may have increased the Germans’ will to continue the war.” This text also addresses the bombing of Japan from a remarkably critical perspective, remarking upon General Curtis LeMay’s orders to conduct “low-altitude night raids and the use of incendiary bombs (made of flammable jellied gas, or napalm).” The discussion continues, noting, “With virtually no navy and a limited number of planes and trained pilots left, the Japanese were nearly defenseless against these assaults.” These depictions of the Allied bombing campaigns offer no moral judgements; they only offer the complete factual picture, properly equipping students to critically examine the role of area bombardment in the war.

King and Napp’s United States History (2005) prefaces the United States’ entry to the war with criticism of Axis area bombardment practices, including a sentence mentioning “German planes bomb[ing] Spanish cities” and a photograph of the devastated London cityscape taken at the height of the Blitz. However, the remainder of the text carries no mention of Allied strategic bombing on either front during the course of the conflict.
“The Good War” Forever

Both the 2009 edition and the virtually identical 2015 edition of *Tennessee United States History: Post Reconstruction to Present* (2009, 2015) consider the civilian toll of the area bombardment perpetrated by all combatants in both theaters of the war. However, the book’s discussion of the Allied bombing campaign of Europe is reminiscent of Todd and Curti’s abdication of American forces, asserting that the British were the ones “dropping massive amounts of bombs on German cities” in “saturation bombing” raids and subsequently stating, “By day, American bombers targeted Germany’s key political and industrial centers. The goal of this campaign of strategic bombing was to destroy Germany’s capacity to make war.” On the bombing of Japan, though, the authors take a more evaluative perspective, commenting on how Japan’s men and materiel shortages left the country “virtually defenseless” against the raids which “hit factories, military bases, and cities.” The text continues, informing the readers of the March 1945 Tokyo raids, noting the destruction of “16 square miles of Tokyo” and the deaths of “over 83,000 Japanese—more than either of the later atomic bombs—and injured 100,000 more.” Although incendiary devices are omitted from the account of the Tokyo raids, the information extant in the text could provide an adequate platform from which to engage in a critical discussion of the air raids.

Standing in stark contrast to its contemporaries, *The Americans: Reconstruction to the 21st Century* (2010), which, as of 2016, is approved for use in the state of Tennessee and carries the logo of the History Channel, vividly depicts the Battle of Britain through photographs of sheltering children, sentences such as, “Still, German bombers continue to pounds Britain’s cities trying to disrupt production and break civilian morale,” and a vignette which describes the experience of an 18-year-old from the East End of London, recollecting, “After an explosion of a nearby bomb, you could actually feel your eyeballs being sucked out. I was holding my eyes to try and stop them going.” However, this indictment of the Germans for the practice of area bombardment against civilians did not translate into a critical discussion of the Allied bombing campaigns — only one sentence, “British pilots also bombed German cities,” mentions the Allies’ air assaults in either theater of war. The text somehow manages to entreat the Tuskegee Airmen without explaining them in the context of the air war against Germany.

With the exception of *United States History: In the Course of Human Events* (1997) and both editions of *Tennessee United States History: Post Reconstruction to Present* (2009, 2015), high school United States history textbooks by and large neither present the information necessary to sustain classroom consideration of Allied area bombardment tactics, nor do they make any attempts to incite such discussion. What Bess characterizes as “the single greatest moral failure of the Anglo-American war effort” warrants two or fewer dedicated sentences in ten of the seventeen texts examined in this work; it warrants no mention at all in two of these ten. Four of the texts acknowledge the practice of incendiary bombing; three provide some form of civilian casualty figures. This means that many students may never have neither the opportunity nor the knowledge necessary to explore the morality of area bombardment in a formal setting, setting the stage for the “good war” to remain forever at power in the American imagination.

FROM A “DUMPING GROUND” TO “CIVIL RIGHTS DENIED”: THE GRADUAL EVOLUTION OF A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE JAPANESE-AMERICAN INTERNMENT IN HIGH SCHOOL TEXTS

In converse to their respective treatments of Allied area bombardment practices, U.S. high school history textbooks have evolved in their depiction of the Japanese-American internment, developing from total omission of the event from the earliest texts to balanced takes with supplemental questions and activities which explicitly prompt students to critically examine the effectiveness, constitutionality, and morality of the policy.

Out of the five earliest published textbooks examined in the production of this text, four either do not carry any mention of the internment or neglect to dedicate even an entire sentence to the wholesale use of concentration camps: *The Development of America* (1947), *America’s History* (1950), *United States History* (1958), and *Rise of the American Nation* (1961). Shockingly, Wirth’s *United States History* contains an entire paragraph considering the situation of “foreigners” and “enemy aliens” that asserts in its concluding sentence, “Americans may be proud of the fact that they fought the greatest war in history and preserved the spirit of liberty upon which their democracy had been founded.” All the sections offering concerning the internment is that “those of questionable loyalty were questioned, and some were interned,” which is a gross understatement—Japanese-Americans were interned regardless of their loyalty; the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, a segregated until comprised of Nisei volunteers from Hawaii and the internment camps, earned 21 Medals of Honor and 8 Presidential Unit Citations on its way to becoming the most decorated unit of its size and period of service in American military history.

The outlier of the five earliest texts, Bailey’s *The American Pageant: A History of the Republic* (1956), presents a harsh indictment of the internment policy. Bailey details the motive behind the internment, proffering, “The Washington authorities...fear[ed] that these people might act as saboteurs for the Mikado in case of invasion.” The text then characterizes the camps as “concentration camps” and as a “brutal precaution [which] turn out to be unnecessary, for the loyalty and combat record of the Japanese-Americans, especially those from Hawaii, proved to be admirable.” Despite his notably critical—for the time period—perspective, Bailey implies...
that the government properly made amends, saying, “Partial financial adjustment after the war did something to recompense these uprooted citizens for their sufferings and losses.” While The American Pageant commendably presents a critical take on the internment, its implicit assertion that the government made amends with the victims hamstrings the overall message of the text.

The Adventure of the American People (1968) slightly modifies Pageant’s precedent of critical consideration of the internment by disregarding the government’s case for exclusion, attributing it to “a wave of fear immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor,” and by asserting that the internment “violated their civil liberties—their enjoyment of freedom of movement and their use of their property.” Graf and Krout note that “no Japanese-American was convicted of espionage during the war” and also acknowledge that “many naturalized citizens as well as nisei...served with distinction in the armed forces.” While this text does not represent the balanced, fully informed discussion necessary to foster true critical consideration from the student (it does not convey the logic behind the internment), it paves the way for later texts that do so.

In a continuation of the critical theme, Freedom and Crisis (1978, second edition) prefaces its discussion of the internment by stating, “The country paid not only a high cost in human life but also a certain moral cost for its victory.” Weinstein and Wilson too attribute the driving force behind the internment to fear, but they also refer to the racism lurking just beneath the surface of the fear, emphasizing that it was “white residents of west coast states [that] feared an internal threat from the Japanese-Americans. They appealed to President Roosevelt to remove the entire community from the west coast.” The text then notably absolves Roosevelt of his role in the tragedy, saying he “bow[ed] to the pressures.” The authors employ Bailey’s term “concentration camp” to describe the relocation centers, and recount how “loyal Japanese Americans needlessly suffered loss of their freedom, homes, land, and dignity.”

Both the second and third editions of The Challenge of Freedom (1984, 1990) present pointed criticism of the internment; the role of civilian hysteria about “enemy agents” and government concern that it was a “military necessity to move these people inland” are both highlighted as conditions leading to the executive action excluding and interning the Japanese-Americans. However, what most notably sets The Challenge of Freedom apart from its predecessors is its discussion of the poor condition which the camps were in—according to the text, the camps were “overcrowded...[and offered] little privacy or recreation.” Also included is a vignette of nearly an entire page providing a first person perspective from an internee on the deplorable conditions in the camp. The authors also note the victims lost “their jobs and their property,” and that the government’s attempt to recompense in 1948 was underfunded, making it “very small in comparison to the actual losses.” Also notable is the inclusion of a discussion question which encourages students to consider, “Why did the federal government force over 100,000 persons to relocate?”  

Life and Liberty: An American History (1984) also entreats the internment in a critical manner, recognizing that “early in the war, the government acted out of fear,” and that, despite their ultimate loyalty, Japanese-Americans were forced “to leave almost everything they owned behind.” Life and Liberty also remarks on how the government’s reparation payments “did not make up for the losses of their businesses, homes, and land they had to leave.” The authors also attempt to foster critical consideration of the situation, asking students, “Why were Japanese Americans put in internment camps during World War II? Were German Americans or Italian Americans treated this way?”

Downey, Giese, and Metcalf’s 1997 work, United States History: In the Course of Human Events is the first textbook examined in this work which provides a full critical analysis of the internment, which begins by touching on the prewar
prejudice and discrimination against Japanese-Americans which only further fueled the hysteria against them after Pearl Harbor. The authors even include provocative newspaper headlines from the period such as “Jap Boat Flashes Message Ashore.” The text then mentions the overcrowded conditions in the camps before launching into an examination of the internment’s legality and its contemporary legal challenges, Korematsu v. U.S. and Hirabayashi v. U.S., even noting the immortal phrase from Justice Frank Murphy’s vehement dissent in the Korematsu decision, in which he states that the evacuation order “fell into the ugly abyss of racism.” After having students consider the 43-year delay in the 1988 repayments, the text challenges them to critically consider a broader issue through the lens of history: “Do you agree that wartime conditions justify curtailing civil rights?” This question embodies the educational potential of history—it provides an unrivaled platform for students to exercise critical thinking skills on a societal level.

The 2005 text United States History delivers little detail concerning the forced relocation and internment of Japanese-Americans—only one paragraph is presented, which pales in comparison to the several page in-depth examination of the policy, its roots, and its legality offered by the previous text. However, what is extant covers the fear behind the decision, the losses of Japanese-Americans, and the loyalty and military service of Japanese-Americans despite their status as second-class citizens. One provided discussion question, “Did detaining Japanese Americans hurt the nation?” carries the potential for critical discussion, but is unlikely to foster it given the thin amount of information provided in the text.

A shining example of a balanced, critical perspective is provided by Tennessee United States History: Post Reconstruction to Present (2009, 2015). The text explicitly identifies “racism, the smaller numbers of Japanese Americans, their lack of political clout, and their relative isolation from other Americans” as reasons for the specific exclusion of Americans of Japanese descent as opposed to those of German or Italian descent. Conditions in the camp are vividly portrayed in a short primary source account—“The resettlement center is actually a jail—armed guards in towers with spotlights and deadly tommy guns, fifteen feet of barbed-wire fences, everyone confined to quarters at nine…What really hurts [is being called] ‘Japs’ ‘Japs’ are the guys we are fighting.” The authors also consider the exploits of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team before embarking on an in-depth exploration of the Korematsu case. The treatment of the Korematsu case is well executed: the book lays out the facts, highlights Korematsu’s claim, and explains the Court’s decision. However, it is the “Why It Matters” section which brings the text to the next level; the text asserts that “in recent years, the war on terrorism has revived talk of Korematsu in discussions of ‘racial profiling’…Defenders of profiling argue that because…attacks were carried out by radical Muslims, it is…logical…to pay special attention to Muslims. Critics insist that racial profiling is a form of prejudice that violates the civil rights of individuals.” Following this, the authors insert a 2004 statement from Korematsu condemning racial profiling, given the precedent of the Japanese internment, and they instruct students to “write an editorial agreeing or disagreeing with Fred Korematsu’s position.”

Such an assignment represents the pinnacle of a history education’s potential to hone a student’s critical thinking skills on a societal level: given a historical precedent and its similarities to a situation in our nation today, what is the right course of action to take and why? Textbook treatments of the internment took 70 years—though United States History: In the Course of Human Events (1997) very nearly achieved this summit—to reach this point, but they evolved to the point where they can help our students critically examine domestic events today.

WHAT AMERICA STANDS TO GAIN

The development of a critical perspective on the Japanese-American internment in our history textbooks, which typically have come to foster crucially broad critical thinking skills in relation to race and the American state, towers over their relative silence on area bombardment. It is inexplicable that these bombing campaigns, “the single greatest moral
failure of the Anglo-American war effort”, lack a critical perspective; moreover, it is inexcusable that only seven out of seventeen textbooks surveyed devote more than two sentences to the topic.

Conversely, what is to be gained by developing a critical take on the practice of area bombardment? Speaking in the current moment, an understanding of the horrors of aerial bombardment would likely increase public opposition to indiscriminate, illegal airstrikes in civilian areas such as those committed today by the Assad regime and Russian forces in Syria, and those desired against the Islamic State by some American politicians. However, the true potential of a balanced, critical perspective lies in its global implications: if we are able to induce our students to critically consider our nation’s conduct abroad in what is considered to have been one of the greatest chapters in its history, they will develop the ability to critically consider our current conduct abroad in an unprecedentedly interconnected world which is as multipolar as it has been in postwar history. Long gone are the days of anti-Soviet zero-sum foreign policy. Critical examination of our international image and conduct abroad are more vital than ever now that they are no longer only compared to those of the “Evil Empire.” Overcoming the scourge of politically beholden “patriotically correct” history and developing our children into worldly-minded critical thinkers capable of objectively considering America’s conduct and perception abroad will be key to the nation’s future; thus, these students and the content of their textbooks should become and long remain a top priority in our educational institutions.
The Good War

Endnotes

[1] See Grimsrud's The Good War That Wasn't — And Why it Matters, Bodner's The "Good War" In American Memory, and Adams' The Best War Ever for samples of scholarship critiquing the "good war" myth.
[6] While Clark was not on the bench at the time of the Korematsu decision, he did play a role in the relocation as Civilian Coordinator for General John DeWitt, then the ranking general of the Western Defense Command.
[10] See Bess (2006) for an example of such a text
[17] Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015. "College Enrollment And Work Activity Of 2014 High School Graduates"; This percentage has declined significantly over time, meaning that a higher proportion of previous graduating classes did not continue their education after graduation.
[18] At Vanderbilt University, students in the College of Arts and Science must complete one course with a thematic focus on the "History and Culture of the United States." However, many (if not most) students avoid critical study of history itself and instead enroll in courses such as "Country Music" and "Feminism and Film" to satisfy this degree requirement. Students in the School of Engineering have no history requirement.
[21] Bailey 1956; on a personal note, my AP U.S. History textbook was the twelfth edition of this text.
[24] The Development of America, 1947
[27] The term is anachronistic; it was then known as the U.S. Army Air Forces
[34] Lapsansky-Werner et al. 2009; Lapsansky-Werner et al. 2015.
[36] Danzer et al. 2010; the History Channel logo represents a potential argumentum ad verecundiam—most high school students likely view the Channel as an authority on historical matters.
[38] Bailey provides a serviceable example of what I consider to be a “non-dedicated” mention — "They [the Marianas] were spacious enough to provide abundant airfields for American super-bombers, and they were close enough to Japan to permit round-trip bombing (Bailey, 1956)." Although the sentence does mention the bombing of Japan, the focus of the sentence is on the value of the islands, and the portion discussion the bombing does little more than acknowledge its existence.
[39] This phrase, dating back to 1942, was thrice deployed in protest of the eastward relocation of Japanese-Americans from the exclusion zone on the West Coast — once by the governor of Nevada, once by the governor of Arizona, and once by the governor of Wyoming. The governor of Wyoming, Nels Smith, additionally warned,"There would be Japs hanging from every pine tree." Their vitriolic reaction to the idea of peaceful resettlement contributed to the decision to host the “enemy aliens” in concentration camps.
[40] The phrase is used to title a section pertaining to the internment in The Challenge of Freedom (Sobel, LaRaus, De Leon & Morris, 1984; Sobel, LaRaus, Morris, 1990).
[44] A term for the Emperor of Japan which had long been considered obsolete by Japanese at the time of publication.
[45] Selden (2005) also surveyed textbook treatments of the Japanese-American internment, and found that four out of five from a similar time period (1958-1968) omitted the internment entirely. This includes the second edition of Rise of the American Nation (Todd & Curti, 1966) and the second edition of The American Pageant (Bailey, 1961). However, I am skeptical of the report that the second edition of Pageant omits the internment, considering that the first edition, which was surveyed for this text, treats the internment in a somewhat critical manner.
[49] Roden et al. 1984
[54] During the 2016 GOP presidential primary race, Senator Ted Cruz of Texas stated his desire to "carpet bomb [ISIS] into oblivion."