

NOVEMBER 13, 2014

AN OPEN LETTER TO: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
McGraw-Hill School Education
Pearson Education
Perfection Learning
Social Studies School Service

FROM: History, political science and religious studies scholars

We, the undersigned, write in reference to proposed social studies textbooks and materials that you have submitted for approval in Texas this year. As scholars teaching this material at the university level, we are committed to ensuring that public schools provide an accurate and unbiased education about American history and government. Such an education must include a robust discussion of the relationship between religion and our nation's founding. Without an understanding of this relationship, students' knowledge about our history would be incomplete.

Unfortunately, your textbooks exaggerate and even invent claims about the influence of Moses and the "Judeo-Christian tradition" on our nation's founding and on Western political traditions.

To cite a few representative examples:

- "When the Framers set out to write the Constitution, they drew upon the wisdom of philosophers, historians and economists. Here are a few of the people whose words influenced the content of that remarkable document." Moses is listed first on this list, followed by Locke, Montesquieu, and Blackstone. The "concept" Moses is alleged to have contributed is that "A nation needs a written code of behavior." (Perfection Learning)
- "[The] biblical idea of a covenant, an ancient Jewish term meaning a special kind of agreement between the people and God, influenced the formation of colonial governments and *contributed to our constitutional structure.*" (emphasis added) (McGraw-Hill)
- "The roots of democratic government in today's world – including government in the United States...include elements related to Judeo-Christian philosophy, dating back thousands of years to Old Testament texts and Biblical figures such as Moses and Solomon." (Pearson)

These and similar passages mislead students about the nature of the religious influence on our founding and directly contradict scholarly consensus in our fields. They distort the legacy of our Founders and major Biblical figures by misrepresenting their ideas and actions.

The opportunity to educate our nation's students comes with a responsibility to treat students and our nation's past with respect. We take this responsibility seriously. By eliminating the exaggerations and inventions in your textbooks about the influence of religion on our founding, you can demonstrate that you take this responsibility seriously as well.

We ask that you revise your proposed materials to make them historically accurate and faithful to mainstream scholarship in our fields.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

(NOTE: Institutional affiliation is for identification purposes only.)

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