

An Analysis of the Depiction of Democratic Participation in American Civics Textbooks

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Few informed observers of American civic education think that American students receive an effective education for democracy. Researchers have addressed this deficit in a number of ways, including studies relating levels of formal education and political knowledge (Campbell et. al, 1960; Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996); extensive empirical studies of student achievement in civics content (Neimi and Junn, 1998), even cross national surveys of student attitudes to democracy (World Values Survey). Another research approach which has sought to find possible reasons for this deficit have included content analyses of civics textbooks and their representations of American democracy, citizenship, and engagement (Anyan, 1978; Carroll, et al., 1987; Wade and Everett, 1994, Avery and Simmons, 2001). Findings have varied slightly but, with the exception of a few, they have found commonalities centering on the uniform depictions of passive citizenship and general failures to address the complexities of deliberation (avoidance of controversial issues). In this paper, I explore the nature of citizenship as conveyed by the three most widely used American civics textbooks.¹ All the texts under consideration share three important qualities: 1) they are used widely in American

high school civics and social studies classrooms; 2) they are survey texts covering the broad institutional character of American democracy; and, 3) they are self-professed guides to good citizenship, i.e., they define themselves as civics texts. Specifically, I looked at how each text defines then represents American democracy and citizenship. The review utilizes an interpretive analysis relying on a close reading of each text, paying careful attention to the way in which each characterizes the role of and best means of citizen participation in light of the specific structures of American democratic institutions.

In my review of the texts, I find an overarching tension between the emphasis placed on the role of citizenship in and the institutional discussions of American democracy. That is, though clearly each text attempts to highlight the importance of active citizenship to American democracy this emphasis is shallow, more often than not, unsubstantiated by direct examples or historical references, and frequently belied by the organizational characterization of America's democratic institutions. The chief failing of each text is the inability or unwillingness to connect the role of participatory citizenship to institutions of democracy in a fundamentally compelling way. That is, the institutions are described in such a way as to undermine the necessity of either citizen oversight or public accountability. Institutional governance is problematized so rarely in these texts, either through exploration of historical examples or through the examination of controversial issues, that good governance is assumed not by virtue of the interconnectedness between citizen and state but by institutional design. That the power of government in a representative democracy is ultimately derived from the people is repeated often in each text but how that power is delegated, with what conditions, and the recourses available to citizens in the event that such delegated powers are abused are left virtually unsaid in each of the texts presently under review. This failure reflects an implicit ambivalence to the role of participation in

American democracy, arguably an express assent to the limited participatory theories of representative democracy as outlined in the works of Peter Schumpeter (1943), Dahl (1956), and Sartori (1962), among others. Ironically, by paying lip service to the importance of citizen participation to American democracy while offering a limited discussion of the means or reasons for the necessity of citizen participation, the texts explicitly limit the scope and implicitly the necessity or value of citizen participation in American democracy.

Definitions of Key Concepts

The definition of a citizen proffered by each text varies slightly. The Glencoe volume offers an inclusive criterion (“a member of a community with a government and laws” (4)), the Holt textbook defines it legalistically (“a legally recognized member of the country” (4)), and the Prentice Hall text classifies it in terms of rights and duties (“a person with certain rights and duties under a government” (46)). In further explicating the concept, each refers to additional (seemingly necessary) qualities of being a citizen, including possessing common histories, customs, and values (Glencoe 4), having a shared commitment to the rules and authority of the government (Glencoe 4), being a “productive and sharing member of society” (Holt 4), and occupying a political and, presumably geographic, space (“Each of us is a citizen of the town, state, and nation in which we live” Prentice Hall 46).

Each text defines democracy, signifying a political system wherein the power to rule, i.e., the government, is the province of “the people” (Glencoe 7; Holt 26; Prentice Hall 26).² There is slightly more variance in the shift from defining democracy generally to representative democracy specifically. The Glencoe volume refers to the impracticality of direct democracy in larger states and thereby defines representative democracy in terms of proxy—“citizens elect

representatives to govern on their behalf....[T]he citizens' representatives carry on the work of government" (7). The Holt volume defines representative democracy as a kind of delegation of authority wherein "the people elect representatives to carry on the work of the government for them. Thus the people consent to be ruled by their elected leaders" (26). The Prentice Hall text defines (representative) democracy by virtue of active choice—" [b]y voting and choosing representatives, the people decide how their government will meet their needs and protect their rights and freedoms" (38).

Though one would hope that the texts would further explore the complicated relationship between popular sovereignty and the delegation of that power to governmental institutions they do little more than to haplessly repeat these characterizations. Each text offers coherent and useful descriptions of government institutions and the way in which they operate and (to a lesser extent) interact with one another, but only manages to *supplement* these narratives with repetitive, empty declarations proclaiming citizens as the final source of authority (e.g., Glencoe 8, 87; Holt 29, 73; Prentice Hall 47, 103, 108). Some of the more specific references to the connection between popular sovereignty and governmental institutions include generic references to the government's responsibility to promote and protect citizens' rights (e.g., Glencoe 8, 126)³ and the more specific allusions to that connection involve references to elections. For example, the Glencoe volume proclaims:

For the writers of the Constitution...popular sovereignty was more than just an abstract idea. They designed a government whose actions would always reflect the will of the people.... Under the Constitution, the will of the people is expressed most strongly through elections. Voters elect representatives to Congress, and through the Electoral College, they elect a President and Vice President as well (88).

The Prentice Hall text offers a more comprehensive picture of the extent of this connection:

Choosing a President every four years is an important process in our democracy. Citizen participation, however, is just as necessary in other elections, including those in states,

counties, cities, and towns. Only by voting can Americans claim to live in a country where the government truly represents the will of the people (489).

Though the Prentice Hall volume does a superior job (as compared to the other two textbooks) of connecting moments of citizen participation to specific democratic institutions, even in this case we find both that the connection established is shallow at best, and “definitively” limiting of the notion of democratic citizenship at worst.

Characterizations of Modes of Participation

Modes of participation represented throughout each of the texts are generally limited to voting for and communicating with representatives. With a few exceptions, including discussions of the functions of interest groups and political parties, the texts represent citizen participation primarily as an individualistic endeavor (citizen votes for representative of his/her choice, citizen communicates with that representative to convey his/her preferences). The Glencoe text describes voting as “the only time that citizens can directly bring about change in their government” and as such, it emphasizes the need to learn about the candidates for whom citizens vote (168). The Holt volume indicates that “[o]nly by exercising the right to vote can citizens carry out the constitutional ideal of government by consent of the governed. Voting is one of the great privileges citizens of the United States have” (103). This characterization of voting as participation lacks in specifics. A slightly more developed connection between citizen and state via voting is made by the Prentice Hall textbook which also highlights voting as the primary means of participation, but by tone and emphasis does by far the best job of providing an emphasis on sustained and active citizenship from early on in the text. In a section entitled “The Office of Citizen” the text offer the following description of American participatory democracy:

Being a United State citizen has a unique meaning. In this country, each citizen holds a very important position of authority. As Abraham Lincoln observed, ours is a government ‘of the people, by the people, and for the people.’ He meant that our government can operate—make laws, build road and bridges, collect taxes, fight wars, make agreements with other countries—but only if we citizens want it to. When we say that the power of our government is based on the “consent of the governed,” we mean that the citizens have the power to decide what our government will and will not do.

As citizens, we elect representatives, people who are chosen to speak and act for their fellow citizens in government. We elect members of Congress as well as the President, city council members, mayors, governors, and many of our judges. They have the power to make decisions and to pass laws.

However, our representatives hold office only as long as we want them to. We delegate—or lend—our power to them. The real power belongs to us. In a way, therefore, each of us hold an office too—the “office of the citizen.” In our society, that is the most important office there is. As citizens we hold it for life” (47).

Again, in this instance, the Prentice Hall volume does a superior job of connecting citizens to the body politic by referring to the conditional nature of the delegation of power from the people to their representatives. Where even the Prentice Hall text fails, however, is in clearly outlining under what specific conditions this delegation of power is granted, and the range of recourses available to citizens when those conditions are not upheld (I will turn to this issue later in the paper).

That voting and the voicing of preferences to elected representatives are clearly two primary means by which citizens in a representative democracy can engage with their democratic institutions needs no further justification. However, engagement *qua* engagement is neither necessary nor prescriptive in its own right; it serves an essential need of democratic governance and a constitutionally limited state apparatus. But what a clear discussion of that mediating necessity or prescription is largely missing in the texts under review.

One way the “whys” of limited government can be explored is by engaging with the historical and theoretical reasons for democratic governance—by connecting the philosophical and historical foundations for the American political system to the way these concerns and issues

ultimately shaped the very institutions and practices of American politics. That is, by connecting popular sovereignty to the development of American institutions. This is of course not the only way that such a connection can be broached. In the absence of a historical study of the rational development of state institutions this connection can be made by specific instances of how citizen participation can or has upheld the institutional processes associated with the American political system. This is precisely what the texts under consideration may be attempting to do. However, the characterizations of citizen participation are so thoroughly disconnected from the institutional processes delineated in these texts that they stand seemingly as an afterthought, lacking in useful specificity. The following are the few instances in which citizen participation is referenced alongside the descriptions of government institutions, and even in these cases, the lack of supplementary historical or institutional examples of the possibilities under consideration belies the extent of their utility in teaching modes of effective citizen participation.

In discussing how a bill becomes a law, each of the three texts deals almost strictly with the role of representatives in initiating and passing legislation. The Glencoe and Holt volumes make only a few cursory references to the role citizens can play in the process by mentioning that citizens can write to their representatives to suggest ideas for bills (Glencoe 227; Holt 131). Neither the Glencoe or Holt texts explore the range of effective means by which these preferences can be voiced to elected representatives. The Prentice Hall text offers a more compelling version of effective communication between citizens and their representatives by directly invoking the power of aggregate interests, noting that citizens can work with others to try to make laws they believe are needed and change laws they think are unfair or harmful to society by communicating these demands to lawmakers and public officials (39).⁴

With regard to means by which the President can influence legislation proposed in Congress, the Glencoe and Holt textbooks indicate that sometimes the President makes direct appeals to the American people through televised speeches. If citizens are compelled by his arguments, they can contact their representatives and ask them to either introduce or pass the legislation (Glencoe 247; Holt 152).

All three texts indicate that public opinion polls can influence the actions of representatives (Glencoe 188-189; Holt 284; Prentice Hall 483). The Prentice Hall text even mentions that public opinion can affect the Senate's confirmation process because "Senators must be responsive to their constituents" (230).

Each text does a thorough job of discussing the roles interest groups play in American democracy, indicating the effectiveness of large groups in influencing the decisions of elected representatives and policy makers (Glencoe 200; Holt 288-289; Prentice Hall 480).

The Prentice Hall text mentions that the offices of some congressional staff set up regular neighborhood meetings which allow a forum for the representative's constituency to discuss issues and voice opinions on political matters that affect them (177).

Each of the three textbooks discusses ways in which political parties offer a useful and practical link between citizens and their government, including specific ways in which citizens can actively participate in political parties (Glencoe 159; Holt 254; Prentice Hall 458). The Glencoe text indicates that parties benefit "the people" in many ways including, by selecting and supporting candidates they ensure that their candidates have the widest appeal; informing the public both on issues and on the failures of the other party with regard to those issues; carrying the people's message by concentrating on issues with which the people are most concerned; acting as watchdogs over government activities and the platforms and actions of the other party;

and establishing a network through which they can effectively communicate through the different levels and branches of government (Glencoe, 159). The Prentice Hall text points to ways in which political parties give citizens a voice in government by ensuring that their common interests are heard by the government; informing citizens by providing facts, figures, party stands on important issues and tip sheets to assist with the voting process, and by arranging meeting with candidates and canvassing prior to elections; and involving citizens in government by providing volunteer opportunities during elections (Prentice Hall, 458-459). The Holt textbook does not offer a specific section on ways political parties assist the participatory process but does make similar claims to the other texts in its description of political parties, including their roles as watchdogs, the way they make it possible for candidates to gain popular support, and the strength in numbers which is afforded citizens of a particular platform (Holt 254).

In summary, there are some references to participatory action alongside institutional descriptions but these are episodic and limited with regard to the range of participatory methods presented (voting and communicating opinions to elected officials). Aside from the few exceptions noted above, the textbooks thoroughly fail to connect active citizenship to American constitutional democracy. This is especially troublesome because the texts are taught not just as an authority on American government but also as civics texts committed to outlining the range and scope of citizenship in an institutional context. By extending their projects to the latter mission, while offering such limited means or reasons for the necessity of citizen participation, the texts undermine the institutional rationale for active citizenship.

Rights and Responsibilities

With only a few exceptions (as noted above) the texts mainly rely on discussions of rights and responsibilities of citizenship as a means of transmitting an “active” notion of citizenship. Each text offers an extensive exploration into citizens’ rights including an analysis of the Bill of Rights and Constitutional amendments expanding voting rights. Each text highlights the freedoms afforded American citizens *vis a vis* the Bill of Rights and ancillary legal rights, including speech, press, religion, assembly, and petition, self-incrimination, adequate defense, trial by jury, etc. Although the discussion of these rights is not nuanced in any of the texts, mostly because these rights are rarely problematized through discussions of controversial issues, each of the texts does a reasonably adequate job of describing what they are and, under perfect conditions, what they are supposed to do. There is little to no discussion in any of the texts, however, of the degree to which these rights were fought for and cemented by citizens, nor do they broach means by which, in the future, citizens can address grievances should such rights be violated. The Prentice Hall volume is the only one to make an explicit connection within the body of the text linking the Constitution to citizen participation. It indicates that most amendments “reflect efforts by the people to change the constitution to meet changing needs and attitudes” (152), and further clarifies that with the exception of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, “all other changes in the constitution were made through peaceful efforts of citizens” (157), and concludes that “[a]ny citizen or group of citizens may propose a change in the Constitution. More than 5,000 amendments have been introduced in Congress, and efforts continue to this day” (157). Even this optimistic appeal to participatory efficacy, however, is not

supplemented with either specific historical instances in which this was achieved, or suggestions regarding how this can be undertaken in the future.

Each volume provides a great deal of very general discussion on citizen responsibility, each isolating voting as one of the primary responsibility of citizenship (Glencoe 133; Holt 103; Prentice Hall 52). Other responsibilities mentioned include being informed (Glencoe 132; Holt 103), taking part in government either as members of a political party or independent voters or as elected officials (Glencoe 133; Holt 103), helping the community (Glencoe 133; Holt 103; Prentice Hall 54), and respecting and protecting others' rights (Glencoe 134; Holt 104). Of the three texts, the Glencoe volume is the only one to add respecting diversity as an additional responsibility, specifically the responsibility to “respect the rights of people with whom they disagree” (135). The Prentice Hall volume is more specific with regard to responsibilities enumerated than the other two and includes examples of how students can fulfill such responsibilities. The list includes holding government office, election campaigns (helping candidates with campaigns), influencing government (“work to get the government to take action on a cause you believe in”—through letters to representatives and newspapers, speaking at city council and school board meetings, joining or creating an organization with the goal of influencing government actions), and contributing to the common good (“acting in ways that protect the rights and freedoms of other Americans”) (51-54).

Moreover, without any regard to the institutional function of citizenship, each text nonetheless avails itself of unsubstantiated references to “good citizenship”. Holt does this most egregiously, even dedicating an entire section on being a good citizen at home, which includes solving conflicts, managing family funds, and preparing for the future (335-337). In another

section of Holt, knowing and obeying laws makes for good citizenship (170) and good citizenship is cited as an aim of education (342).

Accountability

There are some limited references to accountability in each of the texts. The rare compelling reasons connecting citizen participation and good governance are the sporadic references to voting as a means of expressing views and voicing opinions on the past performance of public officials. These references offer a very limited view of accountability of public officials to American citizens—even taken together, the lack of systematic exploration of how this accountability relates to citizen participation virtually undermines its presence within the text. The Glencoe text provides the following way in which citizens can hold their representatives accountable: “[i]f elected officials fail to serve the people as they should, they can be removed from office. Under the Constitution, even the President can be dismissed if he or she commits a crime” (88). The Holt volume indicates that “[i]f the people become dissatisfied with the way their representatives are governing, they can let their representatives know what they believe should be done. They can also elect new representatives in the next election” (73). In singular references, the Holt and Prentice Hall texts indicate that elected officials have a duty to serve their constituents (Holt 131; Prentice Hall 174). The Prentice Hall text expands that to include an additional responsibility to serve the nation as a whole and offers a brief discussion of how these two, at times, conflict (174, 176). It sets up further roles and responsibilities of congressional members. These include responsibilities congressional members have to their political parties and interest groups, and the importance of these bodies as a means of gaining support for reelection; and their role as servants of the people, which entails providing

information and assistance to their constituencies (176). There is also mention, in the Prentice Hall text, that if congressional representatives want to stay in office for more than two years they have to earn the approval of their constituents (178).

In one passage, the Glencoe volume even discusses transparency:

For a democracy to work, its citizens must have access to information and ideas. They must be able to develop their own ideas and beliefs and to meet openly with others to discuss these ideas. They must also be able to express their ideas in public and to have their views on public matters heard by those who govern.

Such an open exchange of ideas is the hallmark of a free society. Access to new and different ideas allows a democracy to grow and change. It also ensures that the ideas of the people will be heard (107).

The Holt text discusses some version of transparency with regard to the existence of the Constitution: “Because we live in a democracy with a constitution, U.S. citizens know what powers the federal government possesses. They also know that their leaders must follow the same laws that the rest of the citizens do” (76).

Even assuming that these (limited) discussions of transparency and accountability have the desired effect of explicating the reasons for a diligent citizen polity, i.e., adequately connect citizen participation to the institutions of American representative democracy, there is still a incontrovertible problem: namely, what recourses are available to citizens should the representative institutions fail to uphold individual rights or the needs of the community? Obviously, the answer provided in the previous section is that citizens can hold their representatives responsible by censuring them via their vote in subsequent elections. However, this option takes for granted (as do each of the texts under consideration) that not all people are equally represented in American democracy. What recourses are available to citizens that constitute a minority on a given issue and, thus, are effectively left outside the demand of accountability from their representatives? By what means can they ensure their constitutional

rights be upheld should the institutional processes of voting and communicating with their representatives fail them? Part of the answer can be found in other modes of citizen participation that are merely mentioned and left largely unexplored in the texts under consideration.

Mentions of Other Modes of Citizen Participation

The texts make isolated mentions of the existence of initiatives, referendums, or recalls in some states. These indicate that citizens can propose laws, state constitutional amendments, or recalls by circulating a petition. If they obtain a certain number of signatures, the proposition or the name of the elected official is then placed on the ballot and the citizens of that state can vote directly on it (Glencoe 182-183; Holt 208; Prentice Hall 248).

Interestingly, of the three texts, Glencoe is the only one to mention legal actions/lawsuits, and it does so on only two occasions: the first occurs within a discussion of the job of lobbyists and how some undertake court action on behalf of the interest group they represent (202); and the other mention is made in a section dealing with civil cases in which the text points that suits of equity can be used to “prevent a damaging action from taking place” and it uses the example of citizens filing “a suit of equity to try to prevent the state from building a highway through a local park” (399). Outside of these brief references (neither represented explicitly as a method of participation) and mere mentions of Supreme Court cases, no indication that individual citizens or groups can use the legal system to test the constitutional validity or general viability of laws.

The Glencoe text explicitly mentions protests and demonstrations, but only on four occasions: once in a small caption attached to a picture depicting a protest (“This woman is protesting government policies” (127)); the second in mentioning limits on rights, using the

example of getting a permit to protest as a limit on rights (128); the third in another caption indicating a “demonstration” (352); and the fourth in a discussion of civil rights demonstrations (637). There are pictures that can be interpreted as visuals of protest, but most either lack captions or refer to “rallies” or “voicing special concerns” (187, 208). In the Holt volume there are a few pictures depicting what could be construed as demonstrations or protests (90, 92, 278, 294) but nowhere in the captions does the text make reference to either, not even in its discussion of the right to assembly within the First Amendment. The only exception is the adjacent page to the cover page of unit 2 entitled “Young Citizens in Action.” The passage refers to a peaceful student protest undertaken to encourage the board of trustees of a university for hearing-impaired students to appoint a deaf president (111). The Prentice Hall text also avoids references to protests, even when pictures of demonstrations are provided (276). In discussing the freedom of assembly, the Prentice Hall text refers to how a group may hold a demonstration to protest a new law (135). The virtual omission of peaceful protest as a genuine mode of participation is especially disconcerting given its function as a means by which citizens share and organize to convey their collective voice to their representatives and elected officials.

Civil disobedience is mentioned only once in the Holt and Prentice Hall texts, and completely omitted from the Glencoe volume. The Holt text refers to civil disobedience during the section on the civil rights movement and indicates that the method was used *in the past* to defy laws that were thought to be wrong. The only addendum to that is that “[s]uch activists generally use civil disobedience only when all other tactics fail” (638). The Prentice Hall text indicates that when laws go against beliefs some people disobey the law. The example of a person who refuses to pay income tax is used and the text goes on to specify that “[i]f people want to change a law, our democratic government provides ways to do so” (395).

Mentions of boycotts are rare in all three texts. The Glencoe and Holt volumes mention the political dimensions of boycotts but both do so only indirectly through historical examples. The Holt text uses the example of the Montgomery citizens' boycotts of city busses and the effect it had on changing segregation laws (637), and the Glencoe text uses the example of boycotts of British goods by colonists and the effect it had on Parliament's repeal of the Stamp Act (37). The only other mention in the Glencoe text is a reference to trade sanctions on international trade (539). The Prentice Hall text uses the term boycott almost exclusively with regard to union activities (320-322). The sole exception to this is with an example of environmental organizations convincing some restaurant chains to boycott Icelandic fish, and thereby forcing Iceland to rethink its whaling policy (549).

There is one short paragraph in the Glencoe text on how citizens can change unjust laws, which offers one of the few specific alternatives to voting or communicating with representatives:

Another responsibility of citizen is to work peacefully to change unfair, outdated laws. This might involve gathering voters' signatures on petitions to place an issue on the ballot for a vote or contacting legislators and asking them to change the law (388).

With few exceptions, as noted above, modes of participation, including boycotts, lawsuits, protests, and civil disobedience—all means by which citizens can ensure their rights are upheld should the institutional processes of voting and communicating with their representatives fail—go largely unexplored as participatory methods. This is at least partially attributable to the fact that the texts under consideration clearly draw a picture of citizenship participation that takes good governance for granted. That is, the underlying supposition conveyed through the largely descriptive and unproblematized representation of government is that the institutions of American democracy manage to operate effectively regardless of citizen participation. Voting

and voice are thus conveyed not as a precondition of the continued effectiveness of government institutions but as an end of the responsibility of citizenship (without regard to the function of that responsibility).

Conclusion

This paper includes several references demonstrating the failure of the texts under consideration to connect the role of participatory citizenship to institutions of democracy in a compelling way. The texts considered in this study eschew historical and contemporary examples that show unresolved tensions in issues or between institutions of American government and thereby avoid an opportunity to deeply engage students with the deep underlying nuances, contradictions, compromises, and cooperation which are the hallmarks of the democratic process. This includes a near total silence on the main challenges facing America and Americans today, including influence of big money in American electoral politics, the increasing national deficit, unresolved issues of equality and distribution of opportunity, even competing interpretations of the Bill of Rights. This silence paints a picture whereby good governance is assumed not by virtue of the interconnectedness of citizens and state but by institutional design. By paying lip service to the importance of citizen participation to American democracy while offering a deficient and unsatisfactory exploration of the varying modes, and indeed, necessity of citizen participation, the texts limit both the scope and value of citizen participation in American democracy.

An important issue, which I hope this brief analysis provides, is the tension which exists in the United States between the rhetoric of participatory democracy and the institutional distaste for all things political, even in civic education. That is, while consecutive administrations have

encouraged, and indeed financially supported, efforts at educating American youth for active citizenship, they have also admonished curricular programs and pedagogical methods which deeply engage students with the underlying tensions, conflicts, and controversies inherent in and between democratic institutions. I am suggesting that perhaps the ambivalence to genuine participatory democracy I point to in these textbooks may, in fact, reflect a critical ambivalence in American society about the desirability of encouraging active citizenship universally. As such, perhaps it would be prudent to further diagnose the disease, before we look for a cure.

In short, if the goal of (civic) education is to teach a reasoned commitment to democracy, and to see that commitment demonstrated through citizen engagement in the institutional democratic processes, can this be achieved through the dissemination of curricular programs that display a clear ambivalence to this possibility? And perhaps more importantly, if we assume that the rhetoric of support for citizen engagement is genuine, how can we explain the pervasive disregard for the deliberative elements of the democratic process?

NOTES

¹ According to an email from People for the American Way (September 1, 2005) and a letter communication to the Center for Civic Education from Amit Shah, the Associate Director of Social Studies at Holt, Rinehart and Winston (February 26, 2005), the three most widely used textbooks are Prentice Hall, Glencoe, and Holt.

² The Prentice Hall text initially forgoes a discussion of different forms of democracy. The first part of the definition of democracy utilizes a popular sovereignty definition, while the second part refers to representative democracy. It is not until much later in the text that direct and representative democracy are distinguished with reference to Athenian and Roman forms of democratic governance (75).

³ By generic I mean only that there is no ancillary exploration of how that responsibility must be fulfilled, or perhaps more importantly, what recourse citizens have should those fundamental rights be systematically undermined.

⁴ Perhaps the most useful component of the section on bills in the Prentice Hall text is that the example of a bill on minimum wage is used to show both issues at play in passing legislation and a practical example of how the legislative branch operates (186-189).

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