Nations not Tribes: Subtle Misrepresentations on Colonial Era Maps
Nyatasha Jackowicz
Wantagh Senior High School

Introduction
Education in history is a fundamental aspect of high school curriculum. An understanding of the past, and the formative events that shaped our present are considered a foundation to a well-educated population who are able to be productive members of modern society. However, the biases of the past often influence the selection of materials used in education. The use of tertiary materials carries a definite point of view from the author. To offset this tendency, secondary and primary source materials are utilized to allow the student a more direct connection to the materials and aspects of the past. Maps are an important graphic component of these source materials.

Maps fall into many categories. Geophysical characteristics, environmental forces, as well as geopolitical divisions can all be depicted on maps. Maps themselves have an intrinsic point of view. The creator chooses the things to be depicted on the map. The map is intended to illustrate a state so that the viewer can quickly grasp the relevant data and have an easier time remembering it. The subconscious impact of the images on the map, which are often color coded, serves to shape the interpretation and point of view that the viewer forms often without any reflection or analysis of the map’s accuracy.

In the education of US history at the high school level maps are often incorporated into the textbooks, or used as supplemental material in the classroom. In Nassau County, New York, the history materials used in eleventh grade history incorporate a number of maps that depict the Native Americans in relation to the European colonists. These maps create a bias in the mid of the viewer due to the choices made in their organization. This paper examines the maps and their intrinsic bias, as well as their impact on the students exposed to them.

History Education
Education in history is part of the high school curriculum in all fifty states of the USA. Different states mandate the required education in history to varied levels. This paper looks specifically at one aspect of US history education in New York State in 2014-15. The New York State Board of Regents determines the requirements in history for the state.

In New York State, there are five key ideas that must be fulfilled in history education from kindergarten to twelfth grade. They are History of the U.S. and New York, World History and Geography, Economics and Civics, Citizenship, and Government (“Social”). In order to graduate high school, the state requires each student to complete one full year course of American History. High school students must also pass the United States History and Government Regents Examination with a score of 65 or higher (“Frequently”). United States History education in New York State has four main stated objectives. High school level students must understand American democratic culture, New York history and U.S. Foreign policy, past ethnic interactions and relationships, and be able to evaluate/determine a historical perspective’s credibility (“Social”).

The understanding of past ethnic interactions and relationships is directed toward the Native Americans. On the New York State Education Department website it places a standard that social interactions between the Native Americans must be taught to New York’s students as well as Native’s “contributions to American society and culture” (“Social”).

Although the state has mandated that this standard must be taught to students, each school determines the method. School districts are allowed to select textbooks and other classroom materials to teach toward the fulfillment of the learning objectives. The measure of success is the attainment of a passing grade on the Regents Examination delivered at the end of the year for a majority of the student population taking the test at the school.

Although textbook selection is not regulated, the adherence to performance standards on the state wide Regents examination creates an intrinsic uniformity in textbooks and approaches. Teachers must “teach to the test,” since their performance is evaluated via student passing rates. The biases and emphasis on the test trickles down to the teaching materials and contributes to an implicit uniformity in education in the state as is evidenced in the material examined in the body of this paper.
Representation of Native Americans on Maps

US History education in New York is administered in both a Regents track and an honors or Advanced Placement (AP) track. Although all students must take the Regents Examination, talented students are able to take a more demanding class that further prepares them for the Scholastic Aptitude Test II Subject Examination in US History, or the Advanced Placement Examination in History. Within these two tracks of high school level US History, there is a presentation of the colonization of North America. The presentation as depicted graphically in the maps chosen to be included in the teaching materials, creates a subconscious subtle yet pervasive bias toward viewing the Native Americans as less organized and less sophisticated than the European colonists.

Each school is allowed to choose the textbooks it uses. There are 56 School districts in Nassau County, New York (“Nassau”). The Wantagh Union Free School District is one of them. In Wantagh High School there are two different textbooks used to teach U.S. History. For regents and honor level it is History Of a Free Nation by Henry W. Bragdon. According to the New York State Education Department website, New York is a “Non-Adoptive State” which means the state does not suggest any material for teaching (“Frequently”).

This means there are potentially unlimited options for supplements to teach students because schools select the books. However the NYS Education Department website also advises the schools to contact the publishers to find textbooks that include the information need to pass the Regents Examination. The Wantagh School District’s Textbook office noted that the majority of the schools in Nassau County use the same textbooks, while private and parochial schools do not. Although NYS allows free adoption of textbooks, the true state of affairs is that the textbooks are selected to allow the student to pass the Regents Examination and therefore contain almost identical content. For Advanced Placement Level US History, Wantagh High School selected The American People by Gary B. Nash. According to College Board, the company that makes the Advanced Placement Test, there are 26 acceptable textbooks teaches AP U.S. History (“AP”). Again although the selections seem unrestricted the realities of the standardized test create a uniformity of included information.

The textbooks used in Wantagh have a flaw. They unjustly represent Native Americans on Colonial Maps. For Example, In the History of a Free Nation textbook, the some of the maps do not give any indication that there are differences in Native American groups. The only map that displays any variation in Native Nations is the map on page 12 labeled “Native American Cultures”.

This map (see FIG. 1.) lists many different ethnic groups of the Natives but it does not have any definite lines that would separate their lands. The culture groups are delineated in various colors. However the individual nations are listed and seem to “float” on the map lacking any definite boundaries. Although some of the groups were nomadic, even they still had areas that they considered to be theirs and used definite geophysical boundaries to define their geopolitical world. Interestingly, this is the most informative map on the Native Americans in this textbook. The next map from the same book on page 57 is labeled the “Settlement of the Colonies, 1587-1760”.

FIG. 1. Map of Native American Cultures from History of a Free Nation page 12
This map (see FIG. 2.) is illustrative of an intrinsic bias. The colonies are depicted with heavy black lines, which create definite impressions psychologically of the clear geopolitical divisions. From 1587-1760, the Native Americans existed in highly organized and populous nations, but they are nowhere to be seen on the map. This map completely ignores the Native Americans presence during the European Colonization of America. Lacking any indication of the Native American nations, the student subconsciously accepts the position that there was no competing geopolitical system in the Americas.

In the same book, the map on page 99 labeled “The Proclamation of 1763” (see FIG. 3.) clearly displays the established colonies. The only mention of the Native Americans is the area labelled, “Indian Reserve.” However, according to the colored legend on the map, the yellow area is “Other British Territory.” Again the implication is that the colonies had definite demarcations while the Native American presence did not.

In The American People on page 216 there is a map labeled “Indian Land Cessions, 1750-1830.”
This map (see FIG. 4.) indicates the time Indian lands were ceded by use of different colors. Yet the map does not have solid lines for Native territories but has definite borders states. The Native American Nations are only labelled as names that “float” without definite boundaries. This inserts a certain bias within the reader’s mind making them believe that the Natives were disorganized when they were not.

In the same book, on page 334 the “Native American Land Cessions in 1840” map labels general areas with only some titles for the Native Americans.

Availability of Materials on Native American Lands and Political Boundaries

In our modern age we have more resources available to us than before. If one inserts “American Indian Maps” in the search engine Google, 62,500,000 search results come up. There is an enormous supply of Native American maps and information which textbook manufacturers ignore. The information is easy to obtain but the effort to properly include accurate information seems lacking.

In Maryland there is the National Museum of the American Indian. This museum is a branch of the National Smithsonian Museum. According to the National Museum of the American Indian they have, “…one of the most extensive collections of Native American arts and artifacts in the world—approximately 266,000 catalog records (825,000 items) representing over 12,000 years of history and more than 1,200 indigenous cultures throughout the Americas” (“Collections”).

This abundance of material could be used to further student’s knowledge in the textbooks in New York State. This museum is dedicated to expanding information and spreading cultural awareness of the Native Americans. There seems to be a disconnect, perhaps unintentional, between the educators and the regulations on history education.

Also there are many historic maps of the Native Americans stored in the Library of Congress. These maps clearly show the boundaries of the Native’s lands as well as labeling them as nations and not tribes. A clear example is a map of the Virginia Colony in 1754 (see FIG. 6.).
The Library of Congress has 113 maps associated with Native Americans as well as 25 available online (“Maps”). It also has short excerpts that give a summary of what each map is representing. This source is easily accessible and is more historically informative than standard history textbooks used in New York.

There are multiple websites that have Native American maps. One Google page gives at least 9 websites that provide maps. For example, on Flutopedia.com it has many Native American maps that clearly show lands that belong to Natives and which lands belong to individual Nations (see FIG. 7.).

Although there are many websites, the best is reepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com. This site has many maps that give distinct boundaries of Native Nations like map 4.a The Cherokee Country (East) 1793-1838.
This map (see FIG. 9.) outlines the Cherokee’s border before, and during the American Revolution, as well as before the ceding of the land to the US. Clearly these maps are readily accessible.

*Atlas of The North American Indian* by Carl Waldman has many maps that show specific native territories. On page 133 the map “New York” by Guy Johnson, 1771 (see FIG. 10.) is a great example of a better format of Native American map.

This map labels the Native American groups of the Iroquois as the Six Nations. It also has small captions on the map indicating where each nation resides. It has a legend that indicates where native villages and major paths were located. This map is one of many in this collection that are well formatted. On page 194 the map “The English Plantations” by Emanuel Bowen, 1754 serves the same purpose (see FIG. 11.).

This map shows the Native’s rivers as well as the regions belonging to certain Native groups. Another interesting thing about this map is that it labels the Native American regions and the Colonists’ regions in the same way.

There are many more examples of these more accurate maps. These are the type of maps students need to use to more accurately and unbiasedly understand the historical development of early US history. There is no dearth in material so there is no excuse for mediocre textbook maps.

**Impact of Maps on Modern New York State High School Students**

Maps play an important role in education. They help further understanding of the material being taught visually. They also provide additional information that students would not know without observing them. These textbooks intentionally chose maps to represent Native Americans and their historical significance in United States History. Maps depicting American colonization placed definite lines showing the colonies’ borders. The bold demarcation of the settler’s colonies psychologically alters the average student’s
mindset. It gives the student the perspective that the colonists had definite political presence and legitimacy. The lack of demarcated lines in Native American territories gives the student the perspective of weak political presence and no legitimacy. It ultimately makes the Native Americans seem to be a disorganized lot of apolitical aborigines with no legitimate political claim to land rights. The improvement of these maps would create an even playing field between the Native Americans and the Colonists in the mind of the student more accurately reflecting the historical truth of early America.

These maps send subconscious messages to the student. The textbook maps create a subtle subconscious predisposition to accept a type of Manifest Destiny and inevitability of colonial expansion as well as domination of America. The by-product of this presentation is the minimization and devolving of the Native American psyche which contributes to a non-legitimized view of them leading to an ongoing discriminatory bias for their history and their current state.

Conclusion

This study has examined the textbooks used in Wantagh High School for History Education and presented the subtle bias that is implied in the maps depicting Native American Nations and European Colonies. In New York State, there is a Board of Regents that seeks to set standards and guidelines for quality education. However the textbooks developed and selected for use to prepare students for the state wide Regents Examination in history perpetuate a bias against the Native Americans creating an on-going subtle and subconscious devaluation of their presence as a geopolitical force in early America. This bias will influence students not only in their history studies, but also in their subsequent appreciation of the Native American and the modern issues related to them. A better more balanced representation in the maps incorporated in the textbooks would be a first step to a more fair presentation of early American history.

Works Cited


