

State Secret: North Carolina and the Cherokee Trail of Tears

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This paper is an analytic essay that examines the treatment of the Cherokee Trail of Tears in a North Carolina fourth grade textbook. I begin by offering a satiric look at an imaginary textbook's treatment of the Holocaust that is based closely on the actual narrative of the Trail of Tears written in the fourth grade text. Following this, close scrutiny is applied to the fourth grade narrative, looking at its subtle messages, its questionable historical methodology, and its lack of drama.

The second half of the paper is organized around the state of American Indian education in North Carolina as reported by the State Advisory Council on Indian Education. The challenges mentioned are investigated in light of the fourth grade text's treatment of the Cherokee Trail of Tears and its possible repercussions. Finally, several ideas for reform are posited for consideration.

Imagine for just a moment, if you will, that you are an elementary school social studies teacher. You are teaching fourth grade and the curriculum calls for you to teach your students about American history. At some point in the school year (probably quite close to the end of the year given the amount of material you are asked to cover) you begin a unit on the Second World War. As a part of this unit, you realize that you must spend at least some time on the Holocaust. Through no fault of your own, the education you received from public schools—kindergarten through college—has left you ill prepared for this topic. You find that you know very little about what really happened in those concentration camps in Europe. With your already-cramped schedule, you have precious little time to do any outside research for your lesson plans. Thus, like so many teachers across America, you find yourself reliant upon the words in your textbook for the information you will use to enlighten and, with a little luck, inspire the children in your class.

Of course you have faith in that textbook. You have no doubt heard stories about the notorious lack of credibility for many texts that are used in schools, but yours is different. Your text is written by a *professor emeritus*, after all. You are introduced to the author by way of a brief biographical entry, and he certainly

seems to be eminently qualified. But as you search through the chapter on World War Two, you are startled to find that there is only a tiny amount of information in the book on the Holocaust. What information there is has been separated from the narrative of the chapter through a “text box”—a small sketch set aside from the rest of the chapter. Rather unfortunately titled “History Highlights,” these boxes occur throughout the textbook and supposedly draw students’ attention to particular historical figures and events. As a veteran teacher, you are all too aware that your students glide past these boxes without pausing unless you specifically direct them to read them. Still, the words in this box are all there is about the Holocaust, and so you determine to do the best you can.

You read the box. When you are done you feel slightly unsettled. There is something that you cannot quite put your finger on, but your instinct tells you that something is missing. You look at the “History Highlights” box again. It reads:

European Catholics, Gypsies, Parisians and the English were not the only ones who suffered from Nazi oppression and aggression. The Jews—an ancient religious and ethnic group—also endured hardship. Their hardships involved removal from their neighborhoods.

When the Nazis assumed power in Germany they began a program they called the “Final Solution.” It involved removing Jews from both urban and rural areas in Germany and the surrounding nations that Germany had conquered and sending them to labor camps. Many Jews suffered greatly in these camps.

Under the leadership of Supreme Allied commander Dwight D. Eisenhower, the labor camps were freed near the end of the conflict. Through the efforts of the United States, European nations and the newly-created United Nations, the Jews were given a homeland in the Middle East which they named “Israel.” Many Jews remain there to this day.

You wish that you had more material, but there has not been time. Your lesson on the Holocaust will be mostly informed by the words above, found in the textbook you were handed by the school board.

The Problem in North Carolina

If the above situation seems offensive, then I invite readers to examine what is being taught or, more appropriately not taught, in the state of North Carolina regarding the Cherokee Indian Nation and what is commonly called “the Trail of Tears.” The scenario described in the opening paragraphs of this essay is a likely occurrence in classrooms across my home state. The textbook itself is not at all make-believe. It is called *North Carolina: A Proud State in Our Nation*, and is published by McDougal Littell of Illinois. The book is a fourth grade text, which is the year in the standard course of study when North Carolina children “learn” about their state’s history.

Like the author in our make-believe textbook, the author of *North Carolina: A Proud State in Our Nation* is well respected in the field of history, particularly

the history of North Carolina. As the “Author Biography” at the beginning of the book informs the reader, William S. Powell is “Professor Emeritus of History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he taught North Carolina history for more than 25 years” (Powell, 2003, p. iii). Such a weighty and impressive introduction is meant to provide the textbook with the imprimatur of professional history in the eyes of the classroom teacher who depends on its accuracy and objectivity. Powell promises the reader that, through his book, they will “begin learning the discipline of history,” and that this process includes “analyzing the role of geography in history, understanding constitutional concepts, gaining information from primary sources, using information to make judgments about historic events, and assuming roles of people different from themselves” (Powell, 2003, p. iii). When it comes to Professor Powell’s treatment of Cherokee removal, however, these promises are hardly kept.

There should be little doubt that many if not most of the elementary school teachers who use Professor Powell’s text will be at least relatively reliant upon his research and narrative for their lessons. The requirements for receiving licensure in elementary education in North Carolina mean that virtually all of a pre-service teacher’s junior and senior years will be consumed with education courses—general pedagogy classes, methods courses, classroom management courses, and various field experiences that culminate in the semester-long student teaching experience. That leaves content to be covered in the pre-service teacher’s freshman and sophomore years. In the handful of survey courses they take dealing with history (and this covers American, world, state, regional, etc.), it is highly unlikely that these future teachers come away with any kind of mastery of the rise and fall of the Cherokee Nation. North Carolina elementary education students are required to take only three courses in history at all: two courses in world civilization and one in either early American history or post-Civil War American history. They may take a fourth course—North Carolina history—as an elective but it is not required. In other words, it is entirely possible for a fourth grade teacher of North Carolina history to have not studied that history since he or she was in the eighth grade; this is the last time a North Carolinian is required to study the state’s history (North Carolina Standard Course of Study, 2003).

The Cherokee Trail of Tears in a North Carolina Textbook

With this in mind, it is almost inconceivable that the fourth grade teacher of social studies will have a mastery of the Cherokee Nation, its history, and its contributions to the United States in general and North Carolina specifically. It is highly unlikely, in fact, that the teacher would even understand the great importance of referring to the entity that was Cherokee culture and society as a “nation” rather than the culturally and emotionally loaded term “tribe.” In the important book *Teaching American Indian Students*, Reyhner and Eder point out that one of the crucial elements of Chief Justice John Marshall’s 1832 decision in *Worcester v. Georgia* was “to affirm that ‘the words ‘treaty’ and ‘nation’ when applied to Indians had the same meaning as when applied ‘to the other nations

of the earth” (Reyhner, Ed., 1992, p.38). Admitting the Cherokee Nation—as well as all other indigenous nations—into the “club” that makes up “the other nations of the earth” is a major curricular goal of post-colonial education and educators. It is highly unlikely to happen, however, when, much like the teacher in the opening paragraphs, the fourth grade teacher of North Carolina history finds him or herself relying on his textbook for information regarding the topic of the Cherokee people. In fact, as we will see, the case of *Worcester v. Georgia* is not even mentioned in the fourth grade North Carolina social studies textbook.

The good news here—and it is cold comfort, indeed—is that the teacher will not make many mistakes regarding the Cherokee Indian people if he or she follows the textbook. The reason for this is simple: the Cherokee show up in North Carolina’s history—according to this textbook—a grand total of *two* times. From the earliest European explorers of what would eventually become North Carolina, through colonial times and into present-day North Carolina, the Cherokee Indians warrant historical attention only twice in this textbook. The first appearance, on page 146, is from the era of the Seven Years’ War or, as it is more commonly known, the French and Indian War. Here, the Cherokee (along with their Indian brethren the Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Catawba) are portrayed as harassing colonists. Fourth grade students using this book are told that the Cherokee “attacked” a North Carolina fort in February 1760 and that they “ambushed” a British force in June (Powell, 2003, p. 146). There is no mention of the seemingly important fact that these attacks were prompted by the constant encroachment of Europeans upon land that had belonged to the Cherokee for centuries. Finally, the reader is informed that in “1761, militia from Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina joined with the British to drive the Cherokee into the mountains” (Powell, 2003, p. 146).

The second appearance of the Cherokee in North Carolina’s history is the textbox dedicated to the Trail of Tears. The box is positioned as the bottom half of page 195, is heralded by a banner that reads, “Historical Spotlight” and has a cute pair of stage lights dangling above the bold-faced words, “The Trail of Tears.” This box is not only insufficient in attention and details, but is also historically misleading at best. As scholars and students of the era of Indian Removal have long known, there was more than one “trail of tears” in the United States. Many Indian nations were removed from the Southeast to Indian Territory, and the phrase “the trail of tears” has come, over time, to stand for the removal of all these peoples. The Cherokee themselves referred to their removal from ancestral homelands as *Nunnadautsun’t*, or “The Trail Where They Cried” (Byers, 2004, p. 47).

A Poor Comparison

The historical inaccuracy of the term “Trail of Tears” is, however, the least of the box’s issues. In the textual narrative that sits above the “Historical Spotlight” section, Powell writes about the challenges that faced many North Carolina farmers in the period between 1815 and 1850. Under the subheading “Farm

Conditions and Migration,” the reader is provided with a list of the issues facing nineteenth century North Carolina farmers, such as a “lack of adequate transportation and communication” (Powell, 2003, p. 195). There is nothing inherently wrong, of course, with examining these issues. But keep them in mind as we look at the opening paragraph of the textbox on the Trail of Tears. It reads:

People of European descent were not the only group that suffered in the early 1800s. The Cherokee—a Native American group that claimed North Carolina lands long before the arrival of the Europeans—also endured hardship. Their hardship had not to do with poor farming conditions or lack of industry but with the loss of the land on which they lived (Powell, 2003 p. 195).

Remarkably, this language would seem to be equating the removal of the Cherokee people from their ancestral homeland, as well as the concomitant suffering and tragedy that ensued, with the *poor farming conditions* faced by Euro-American North Carolinians.

Moreover, the words of the opening paragraph do not reflect the gravity of the topic. The Cherokee, the reader learns, “also endured hardship” (Powell, 2003, p. 195). Again we have the explicit comparison of removal to tough farming conditions, but the subtle slight cuts deeper. The choice of the word “hardship” hardly connotes the magnitude of the devastation wrought by the removal of almost the entire Cherokee Nation on their culture, government, and, indeed, their very population. While this is a fourth grade text and the author, like the teacher, must be sensitive to developmentally-appropriate materials, the choice of the word “hardship” is too innocuous to convey the tragedy he is attempting to teach us about.

Worth a Thousand Words

The account gets no better in the second of the three paragraphs devoted to the Trail of Tears. In this one sweeping paragraph the reader is given the briefest possible overview of what occurred. The paragraph concludes with the following text:

In 1838, General Winfield Scott and about 7,000 troops were sent into the mountains by President Andrew Jackson to force 15,000 Cherokee to leave their homes and travel to what is now Oklahoma. Most of the Cherokee left the region, suffering greatly on their trek which has come to be called the Trail of Tears (above) (Powell, 2003, p. 195).

The parenthetical “above” at the end of this text refers to Robert Lindneux’s famous painting of the Trail of Tears. It is the only visual representation of the Cherokee from this period included by Professor Powell. There are other extant pictures that could illuminate the Trail of Tears, but Powell chooses not to use them.

The photograph on page 9 of this article is included in James W. Loewen’s (1996) terrific book, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* and serves as a real eye-opener for many students



Robert Lindneux's painting is the only visual representation of the Cherokee removal in *North Carolina: A Proud State in Our Nation*.

of history. My college students—all aspiring social studies teachers—arrive with the impression that the Cherokee were living in nomadic communities and tipi villages at the time of the Trail of Tears. They are shocked when I show them this picture of Cherokee elder James Vann's elegant, plantation-style home. Vann owned "hundreds of acres of farmland around the house" (Byers, 2004, p. 10). He boasted an impressive library at his home as well, including "volumes of English poets" (Ehle, 1988, p. 16). Vann was not representative of all Cherokee, of course. In many ways his home is a testament to the growing division among the Cherokee people between "traditionalists" and "assimilated" Indians. This division helps to portray the Cherokee as a diverse and complex society. A discussion of the Cherokee Nation as such a society—as opposed to a static and simple "tribe"—would be a welcome improvement to the current curriculum. While Powell cannot be accused of purposely promoting the stereotype of Cherokees in tipis, his text and the lone painting do, in fact, fail to provide young North Carolinians with enough accurate information to disabuse them of these historically inaccurate stereotypes.

Robert Lindneux's painting is both moving and accurate. I have no quarrel with its inclusion in a lesson or text that deals with the Trail of Tears. The problem here is that this becomes the only lasting image of the Cherokee removal that students will ever have, and, absent any textual contextualization or other images with which to compare, it hardens the image many students have of all American Indians being like the Plains Indians in dress, manner and custom. Lindneux's portrayal of a bedraggled band of Cherokee crossing against an ominous backdrop is powerful, but there needs to be more, either in the way of text or another picture, such as the one of the Vann plantation. As Reyhner (1992)



Chief James Vann Plantation House at Spring Place

has written: “The danger to students is not the stereotypes themselves, but the possibility that students will come to believe that the stereotypes accurately represent a whole group” (p. 158).

If the tragedy of Cherokee removal is to become real for young students of North Carolina’s history, they need to understand how much was lost by the Cherokee as a result of the government’s policy. Students need to be made aware of the fact that the Cherokee Nation was, indeed, a functioning nation when General Winfield Scott and his troops arrived (or, more accurately, *invaded*). It makes a difference in the way the students view the magnitude of the tragedy if they know that the Cherokee were not, in fact, living a nomadic lifestyle but were, in actuality, quite a bit more civilized than many of their Euro-American counterparts in North Carolina, Tennessee and Georgia. The Cherokee of the 1830s dressed similarly to their Euro-American neighbors, and had “...a constitution, a national council that made laws, and a system of courts. [The Cherokee Nation’s] officials were democratically elected by the people” (Byers, 2004, p. 12). Unlike much of the area that would become the Confederacy, the Cherokee had a “...network of roads, schools, churches and businesses” (Byers, 2004, p. 12). There was a national newspaper, *The Cherokee Phoenix*, operated by Elias Boudinot and printed in both English and Cherokee. A student could know none of this from the North Carolina textbook.

Death on the Trail?

Perhaps the single most staggering omission in this textbook's treatment of Cherokee removal is the fact that it fails to inform its fourth grade readers that there were Cherokee deaths that resulted from the government's policy. Powell's words do not tell of *a single Cherokee Indian death* as a result of removal. The closest that Professor Powell comes is when he writes that "the Cherokee... suffered greatly on their trek" (2003, p. 195). Compare those words to the account written by John Ehle (1988):

Many of the deaths [on the Trail] were of infants whose nursing mothers were ill with intestinal diseases. The sick infants bawled until too weak to cry. One mother carried the corpse of her infant for two days, keeping it company (p. 390).

This powerful paragraph is not too graphic for fourth grade sensibilities. Textbook publishers may be afraid that such a depressing account would not be adopted by North Carolina school systems. Whatever the reason, failing to acknowledge that there were Cherokee deaths that resulted from being uprooted from their homes and transported halfway across the continent is, or certainly should be, historically and morally unacceptable.

Although there continues to be lively debate and disagreement among scholars as to the precise number of Cherokee deaths along the Trail of Tears, there is no disagreement whatsoever that *some* Cherokee perished. The numbers depend, as Ehle (1988) tells us, "on the authority accepted" (p. 390). United States government figures at the time placed the number of Cherokee dead at approximately 400, while the figures of Dr. Elizur Butler, a physician and Cherokee advocate of the time, placed the total number of dead from the internment camps and the Trail at approximately 4,000 (Ehle, 1988, p. 390). As Ehle (1988) writes, "'Whether one accepts the Butler figures or the government figures, deaths were numerous, [and] suffering was intense" (p. 392).

Subtle Messages

A second, though slightly less profound, omission comes in Powell's (2003) choice of words: "what is now Oklahoma" (p. 195). It is reasonable to assume that a fourth grader reading this text would think little of the phrase, and if they did think about it they would probably assume that it refers to the time when Oklahoma was a territory—the time preceding statehood. This only tells part of the story, though. Present-day Oklahoma was once Indian Territory—the piece of land carved out for American Indians and bequeathed to them in perpetuity. It may well be claimed that the sorry tale of Oklahoma's transition from promised Indian country to a state is not the purview of a textbook on North Carolina history. But that story is an integral part of the story of the Cherokee, as is implicitly acknowledged with the inclusion of Oklahoma as the destination of the Cherokee who were forced to leave North Carolina.

The final paragraph of Powell's treatment of the Trail of Tears deals with the story of Tsali and the Indians who remained behind to form what is now the Qualla Boundary Cherokee Indian Reservation in western North Carolina. Surprisingly, Professor Powell does inform his readers that Tsali and his two sons were executed, but he tells them nothing of the historical controversy that surrounds Tsali and his deeds. Powell portrays the tale of Tsali as if there were no controversy, when in fact scholars continue to debate the accuracy and veracity of the competing versions of who Tsali was and what he did or did not do. Even the Museum of the Cherokee Indian on Qualla Boundary, which provides an otherwise hagiographic portrayal of Tsali, tells visitors that "the man merged with the myth and Tsali became an immortal legend...of the Cherokee people" (King, 1988, p. 106). Ehle (1988) notes that Tsali's story was gradually embellished by William Holland Thomas, James Mooney and others (p. 392). Professor Powell forfeits a grand opportunity to give students a glimpse of the debates that form the discipline of historical inquiry when he ignores that a debate even exists around Tsali.

Given the overall tone of the "Historical Spotlight" in *North Carolina: A Proud State in Our Nation*, it should come as no surprise that Professor Powell feels the need to provide his readers with a happy ending to the story of the Trail of Tears. After informing the reader of Tsali's execution, Powell (2003) writes that the "remaining people were permitted to stay in North Carolina. They were granted United States citizenship, and each family received land" (p. 195). Powell makes it sound as if this was the result of compassionate government largesse, when in fact the Cherokee who remained to form the Qualla Boundary remained because they were never "expected by either the national or the state government to go west; they were exempt" (Ehle, 1988, p. 386). These Cherokee "had lived in North Carolina outside the Cherokee boundary, on land of their own, in accordance with the federal treaty of 1819, quite apart from the [other] Cherokee holdings" (Ehle, 1988, p. 386).

Colonialism and Paternalism

The Cherokee who remained were not "permitted" to stay thanks to the good graces of the federal or state officials, but because they were viewed as separate from the Cherokee Nation members being removed. These Indians did shelter refugees who were fleeing the army and attempting to avoid removal, but the vast majority of the Indians who established the Qualla Boundary did not go west because they were never expected to—not because of the noble sacrifice of Tsali or because of the relative incompetence or decency of the government. Either Powell did not know this, or he decided it was too complicated for fourth graders and that it would therefore be permissible to portray the Cherokee as a monolithic and rather simplistic society. Perhaps he hoped or assumed this would be corrected by his readers' eighth grade history teacher.

It should be a cardinal sin of historical scholarship for one to ever write or suggest that a single American Indian "received" land from the United States

government. Friere (2000) writes that groups are oppressed through “the forms of cultural action with which they [the oppressor] manipulate the people by giving them the impression that they are being helped” (p. 141). “Receiving” land from the government changes Indian Country from a birthright to a handout, and becomes part of a misleading national narrative/myth in which the moral victors (European America) kindly dole out benevolence to the unenlightened losers (Indian America). This myth hardens into a core of racism and misunderstanding over the course of time. Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1932) has written that the nineteenth century privileged class believed of the poor that, “...the poverty of the workers was due to their laziness and their improvidence” (p. 123).

The acreage that constitutes the modern American reservation system is not land that was granted to the Indian people or given to them by the government. Rather, those lands are all that remain of the indigenous nations that were encountered and conquered by the United States. To suggest otherwise is more than mere semantics. To tell young American students that reservation land was “given” perpetuates the notion of the Indian as ward, and sets up the stage for a well of resentment for the students (and their families) who must “earn” their land and their keep. This is a particularly insidious and dangerous issue in Indian Country.

Maxwell Taylor Kennedy (1998), the son of the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy, quotes his father as having written that, “...what is given or granted can be taken away” (p. 3). Giving Professor Powell the benefit of the doubt, it is unlikely that he thought about the power of the verb *received* in his treatment of Cherokee removal. Still, we must think about it. The idea that land—any land—was given to the American Indian, Cherokee or otherwise, sets historical truth on its very head and tells young students something that is simply false. The images that are taught or even suggested to students become very difficult to correct. It may seem overly critical to focus on one verb in a textbook, but this verb and all it implies echoes across time and delivers a powerful lie at the expense of all American Indians. Parents, teachers and scholars must demand better. In the next section, we will see some of the possible consequences of such poor history teaching.

The State of Indian Education in North Carolina

It is a chilly October night in the North Carolina Mountains, and I am sitting with two colleagues in the Cherokee Boys and Girls Club on the Qualla Boundary Reservation. The day had been warm but, as happens in western North Carolina, once the sun disappears behind the Smoky Mountains, the temperature drops quickly and often precipitously. The turnout is not good for this meeting; because it is a Sunday night we have only five students from Cherokee High School in attendance. It is not much, but I tell myself that it is at least a start.

I am here to begin recruiting Cherokee students for a new program I am trying to launch at Appalachian State University (ASU) that will prepare Cherokee teachers for work in the schools on the reservation and even, eventually,

in the surrounding counties of Swain, Jackson, Graham and Haywood. In doing this, I am trying to keep a promise to my late Grandfather, who was born in the Big Cove community on the Cherokee reservation and spent his first years there. I have the support of my faculty and colleagues and administration, so I am excited about this first trip.

I quickly learn, however, that becoming a teacher is not something any of the five Cherokee students in front of me have even remotely considered. With the brutal honesty that is often the hallmark of youth, they chuckle when I first mention the new program and what we are hoping to accomplish at ASU. It becomes clear through our conversation that these students do not view education as a field that an American Indian would enter. When I ask them, they can think of one American Indian teacher they have had and, when they think about it, they are not entirely sure if she was American Indian or not. With no role models or mentors in the field, not one of these students is interested in becoming a teacher and no, they tell me, they do not think any of their friends are, either. This lack of American Indian educators not only affects their future plans, it also has direct implications for their academic present. Jon Reyhner (1992) cites a 1986 Arizona study of Bureau of Indian Affairs and Indian-controlled schools by Lois Hirst that “found that Indian students who had Indian teachers did better on standardized achievement tests in reading and language arts” (p. 70).

A Crisis in American Indian Education

I believe the problem goes deeper, however, than just the lack of American Indian teachers, however serious a problem that might be. There is what might well be termed a crisis in Indian education in North Carolina. The 2005 annual report of North Carolina’s State Advisory Council on Indian Education (SACIE) outlined many of the issues facing American Indian students in the state. Among their findings, the SACIE reported that “American Indian males continue to have the worst dropout rate of any other group in the state” (State Advisory Council on Indian Education, 2005, p. 7). The dropout rate for American Indian males in North Carolina was 3.52 percent, as opposed to 1.7% statewide (State Advisory Council on Indian Education, 2005, p. 15).

These sad numbers are consistent with national trends, as well. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported the dropout rate for American Indians at a staggering 15 percent, second only to Hispanics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005a). Stevens, Jr. and Wood (1992) have labeled dropping out of school “the ultimate form of resistance,” a view which will become more crucial as we further examine the crisis in American Indian schooling (p. 61). Sandy Grande (2004) cites a 2001 study conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that found almost apocalyptic numbers for American Indians aged twelve to seventeen. According to Sandy Grande, the study showed that:

Illicit drug use is more than twice (22.2%) the national average...Heavy alcohol use is higher (3.8%) that [sic] the national average...[and] Suicide

is the second leading cause of death for AI/AN youth aged fifteen to twenty-four, and the overall suicide rate is 2.5 times higher than the combined rate for all races in the United States” (p. 18).

Overall participation of American Indian students in “advanced level coursework” in North Carolina schools—the very kind of coursework designed to prepare one for higher education—was “fairly low” (State Advisory Council on Indian Education, 2005, p. 15). This was not surprising, since the report went on to note that “Students feel their input goes largely unsolicited by their teachers and guidance counselors when it comes to making major decisions about their educational experience” and that “School staff seldom encourage any of these [American Indian] students to pursue higher education” (State Advisory Council on Indian Education, 2005, p. 16). This trend is also mirrored in national data, where American Indian students make up only “1.0 percent of the total enrollment in degree-granting institutions” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005b).

The overall focus of the 2005 report was not on dropout rates or the lack of encouragement for the pursuit of higher education, however. The focus of the annual report of the SACIE was suspensions and expulsions among American Indian students. The report noted that “Suspensions have increased for American Indian students, particularly long-term suspensions” (State Advisory Council on Indian Education, 2005, p. 15). The data showed that the “numbers of incidents of American Indian student short-term suspensions...nearly doubled over the last four years” (State Advisory Council on Indian Education, 2005, p. 16). Long-term suspensions of American Indian students in North Carolina jumped from “62 students in the 2002-03 school year to 102 students in the 2003-04 school year” (State Advisory Council on Indian Education, 2005, p. 16).

National data shows that American Indian students are suspended or expelled at rates higher than any other ethnic group except African-Americans (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005c). The SACIE found that “the effects of suspension are far-reaching” (State Advisory Council on Indian Education, 2005, p. 16). NCES states, almost comically, “Students who are disruptive in school or who are not in school may not be fully engaged in active learning” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005c). This is indeed the case.

The question may well be asked: what does all this have to do with Professor Powell and his treatment of Cherokee removal in his textbook? I do not lay the blame for the state of American Indian education in North Carolina—and certainly not in the rest of the country—at Powell’s feet. I do believe and assert, however, that the pitiful portrayal of Cherokee removal and American Indians in general in Powell’s textbook serves as a powerful symbol of a problem that exists in North Carolina’s education of her American Indian population. Paulo Freire (2000) has written that, “When people lack a critical understanding of their reality, apprehending it in fragments which they do not perceive as interacting constituent elements of the whole, they cannot truly know that reality” (p. 104). The North Carolina fourth grade textbook—whether wittingly or not—

contributes to this lack of critical understanding. Moreover, it contributes to a pernicious “framing” of the history of the Cherokee and the Trail. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2004) writes that “...governments and social agencies have failed to see many indigenous social problems as being related to any sort of history” (p. 153). I would hasten to add that we have also failed to see many of these problems as related to the *teaching* of history.

Among the depressing data about suspensions and dropouts, the SACIE report includes some very illuminating statements. While scholars must always be very careful about drawing inferences of causality, these statements deserve a close inspection. North Carolina’s SACIE report included information gleaned from interviews with American Indian students in the state who had been suspended. The report states that “These students consistently spoke of common factors in their school experience” (State Advisory Council on Indian Education, 2005, p. 16). Some of these common factors have been discussed already, but there are two that stand out and that should be discussed in light of Professor Powell’s textbook.

Feelings of “Invisibility”

The first factor reported by the SACIE is that “students feel ‘invisible’” (State Advisory Council on Indian Education, 2005, p. 16). The report further states that students counter this feeling by acting out—“Visibility is magnified when students are labeled as ‘troublemakers’” (State Advisory Council on Indian Education, 2005, p. 16). It should not be surprising that American Indian students—Cherokee, Lakota, Navajo, and so on—feel invisible. As late as 1983 Susan Urmston Philips could write that “Until the recent media publicity on reservation conditions and on the activities of the American Indian Movement, the majority of the U.S. population was not even aware that Indians still existed in this country” (p. 35).

Having examined the fourth grade textbook’s treatment of North Carolina Indians in general and the Cherokee in particular, is it any wonder that American Indian students feel “invisible?” Their story—with all its triumphs and its tragedies—has been whitewashed out of the historical narrative and, therefore, the historical consciousness, of the state. It is no wonder that Loewen (1996) writes that American Indians, like so many other disenfranchised minority groups in America, “...view history with a special dislike. They also learn history especially poorly” (p. 12). The effect of sanitized and incorrect history in our schools is that, as Loewen phrases it, “history is the only field in which the more courses students take, the stupider they become” (p. 12).

Denying the young American Indians of North Carolina their heritage and history is denying them something of which they can and should surely be proud. No doubt young Cherokee hear of exploits by Attacullaculla, Major Ridge, Tsali and others from their elders outside of the school house, but it is a shame that such history is not a part of the formal curriculum for all of North Carolina’s children—Indian, Euro-American and other races as well. The contributions of the American

Indian to the world are undeniable. Most Americans are unaware that “Indians gave the world three-fifths of the crops now in cultivation” (Weatherford, 1988, p. 71). Benjamin Franklin is said to have been at least partly inspired to press for a stronger union between the British colonies in America by the Iroquois Confederacy with which he was intimately familiar.

Author Jack Weatherford (1988) has labeled the American Indian as “the world’s greatest farmers” and written an entire book (*Indian Givers: How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World*) chronicling their contributions (p. 95). Among these contributions, Weatherford (1988) writes that American Indians:

Developed superior [to the “Old World”] agricultural skills and technology, and they surpassed the Old World in pharmacology. They had far more sophisticated calendars than the Europeans, and the Indians of Mexico had a mathematical system based on place numbers superior to the numerical systems then in use by the Spaniards (p. 251).

Still, Weatherford (1988) decries the lack of appreciation, understanding, or even knowledge of the role of American Indian contributions to the modern world. As he so eloquently and powerfully phrases it: “Columbus arrived in the New World in 1492, but America has yet to be discovered” (p. 255). In short, *of course* American Indian students feel invisible, their ancestors and their heritage have been systematically written out of local, state and national history. This is clearly and painfully evident in Powell’s fourth grade textbook.

Feelings of Harassment

The second factor that suspended American Indian students spoke of to the SACIE was “Feelings of harassment by non-American Indian students happens a great deal” (State Advisory Council on Indian Education, 2005, p. 16). I have already discussed the subtle implications of implying that reservation land is land that was “received” by American Indians from the federal government. Powell (2003) also asserts that American Indians were “granted United States citizenship” (p. 195). Under other circumstances the verb *granted* might not be troublesome. Like most words, however, *granted* in this case does not exist in a vacuum. Given the paucity of information on American Indians in North Carolina in general and the Cherokee in particular in the curriculum, the harassment North Carolina American Indians spoke of at the hands of non-Indian students may well be motivated by feelings that American Indians have always been little more than obstacles to the American story who were then, inexplicably, rewarded for this behavior with free land and citizenship.

Sadly, the SACIE report does not include any information on the attitudes of non-Indian students or clues as to their behavior other than the “harassment” that is felt by many American Indian students in North Carolina. It is evident, however, that one could not reasonably expect tolerance or, even more hopefully, respect, to be learned from the treatment of Cherokee removal in Professor Powell’s textbook. Gary R. Howard (1999) writes of Euro-Americans: “We need

to understand the dynamics of past and present dominance, face how we have been shaped by myths of superiority, and begin to sort out our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors relative to race and other dimensions of human diversity” (p. 4.) Certainly Powell is not directly responsible for the racist feelings or leanings of some non-Indian students in North Carolina. However, he did squander a golden opportunity to reach and teach such students at a young and impressionable age through his textbook. Such lost opportunities can seal the fate of entire generations.

In the foreword to the SACIE report, Chair Louise C. Maynor writes:

As a result of the findings from interviews with students who have been suspended, we restate our claim that schools cannot afford to ignore American Indian students. Their heritage, their identity, and their place in the school environment must be celebrated. *They must not remain invisible and silent in our classrooms* [emphasis added] (State Advisory Council on Indian Education, 2005, p. 7).

Maynor goes on to quote from a study by Dr. Ardy Bowker Sixkiller Clarke who found that, like all children, “native [sic] students need to feel valued; they need caring, sensitive teachers” and “they need teachers who are informed on American Indian history and culture and who have high expectations for them” (State Advisory Council on Indian Education, 2005, p. 7). Amazingly, of the six recommendations offered by the SACIE, not one deals with the kind of necessary curricular reform that would address the history currently taught in North Carolina’s schools and exemplified by Professor Powell’s Indian Removal farce. To be fair, the fifth recommendation does call for the state to “Continue to support professional development for teachers to enhance their knowledge of American Indian history and culture” (State Advisory Council on Indian Education, 2005, p. 18).

A Call for Change

While increasing the knowledge base of teachers as it relates to American Indian history and culture is certainly a laudable and important beginning, it is highly unlikely that professional development alone would solve the problem of a curriculum that takes too little notice of North Carolina’s Indian population. Loewen (1996) reminds us that “the teaching of history, more than any other discipline, is dominated by textbooks” (p. 13). With this in mind, it would certainly behoove the state of North Carolina—if it is serious about making its American Indian students truly visible—to put in place policies that would carefully examine the quality of the content in the books that will be at the heart of the curriculum. Without reform of this kind, it is a highly dubious proposition that the state of American Indian education will improve in this or any state.

Teacher Preparation

One of the most important steps that North Carolina could and must take is to demand that teacher preparation classes—particularly those involving multiculturalism and issues of diversity—take into account the state’s considerable

American Indian population. In addition to the Cherokee, North Carolina boasts seven other recognized American Indian peoples—the Coharie, Haliwa-Saponi, Lumbee, Meherrin, Occaneechi, Sappony and Waccamaw-Siouan (State Advisory Council on Indian Education, 2005, p. 11). Despite this wonderful diversity, teacher preparation courses designed to prepare future teachers for working with North Carolina's diverse population tend to focus on European-American, African-American, and North Carolina's burgeoning Hispanic population. Future teachers must be made aware of the proud and considerable American Indian presence in our state. To wait until teachers are already in the classroom and hope to teach them the beauty and diversity in Indian North Carolina or America in one afternoon's in-service will not suffice.

I recently presented at the North Carolina Council for the Social Studies annual conference in Greensboro on this topic, and I was heartened to see and hear from the fourth and eighth grade teachers who came to learn more about teaching American Indian culture and, specifically, the Cherokee Trail of Tears. These educators understood that there was a problem in the curriculum and came seeking help in addressing it. One of their primary concerns was how little they knew and the effect this had on their approach to the subject. As the title of Gary R. Howard's 1999 book on multicultural education informs us, "you can't teach what you don't know."

The Curriculum

The most daunting challenge is to form a more inclusive curriculum in which the American Indian plays a role in the development of the state of North Carolina. The Cherokee cannot show up only twice in a textbook that purports to be the story of the state. As I have written elsewhere, "To make the study of history relevant for all of our people, it is a moral imperative that we teach the history *of all our people*" (2007, p. 68). The Cherokee Trail of Tears deserves more sustained and mature analysis and discussion, but the change must not stop there. Cherokee warriors and heroes are not relics of the past—they exist now and walk among us. In 1973, Cherokee Frank Clearwater was killed by gunfire while defending the rights of American Indians at the siege in Wounded Knee, South Dakota (Smith and Warrior, 1996, p. 248). Clearwater and his wife, Morningstar, had hitch-hiked from North Carolina to be a part of the American Indian Movement's fight for the sovereignty and dignity of indigenous peoples across the United States. Robert Bushyhead helped to revive the study of the language on the Cherokee reservation in North Carolina and now, thanks to his efforts, young Cherokee students are teaching their parents the language that my grandfather was not allowed to speak. My Great Aunt, Arizona Swaney, returned from the Hampton Institute in Virginia and helped preserve an ancient Cherokee form of basket weaving that is still passed down among my people today (Lindsey, 1995, p. 192-93). These men, and women like former Eastern Band of Cherokee Principal Chief Joyce Dugan, should be included in a textbook that seeks to teach about the Cherokee.

A portrayal of the Cherokee people as they currently exist in North Carolina might go a long way to ending some of the stereotypes that cling so perniciously to the American Indian image in non-Indian society. Vine Deloria (1969) writes that, "The more we [American Indians] try to be ourselves the more we are forced to defend what we have never been" (p. 2). Bordewich (1996) has written of this topic that "it is almost as if a culture that is literally saturated with allusions to fictional Indians had no interest in living Indians at all" (p. 17). To portray the Cherokee people accurately, North Carolina's curriculum of the past must be improved, but we also must insist that students and future North Carolina leaders take a long, hard look at the Cherokee of today. The combination of both these elements is all that will suffice if we hope to end the feelings of invisibility among Cherokee and other American Indian students.

Finally, a deeply needed aspect of curricular reform involves allowing for the Cherokee people—past and present—to speak for themselves. The use of primary documents that will give voice to the Cherokee people would be a welcome addition to social studies curriculum. There are ample resources for social studies teachers to use in this area, such as Vicki Rozema's (2003) fine *Voices from the Trail of Tears*. Mick Fedullo (1992) has written powerfully about his experiences teaching in Indian schools in the western United States, and about the empowerment that occurred in his classroom as he taught poetry as a means of self expression to American Indian children who were being denied such expression in almost every other facet of their educational experience. Even if Professor Powell's textbook on the Cherokee Trail of Tears had been without flaws, it still would not have included the authentic voices of the Cherokee men and women who trekked that painful journey. Historical scholarship and technology now makes it possible for fourth grade teachers (as well as others) to have access to these voices. Our students should, as well.

Conclusion

There is one aspect of Professor Powell's treatment of Cherokee removal that seems poetically appropriate. The book's thirteenth chapter—the chapter in which the "Historical Spotlight" piece on the Trail appears—is entitled "The Sleep of Indifference." This is a fitting title for the approach that has often been taken towards the contributions and the story of American Indians in our history classrooms in North Carolina and, indeed, across the United States. Our Indian students are telling us that they feel invisible, and when we examine the content of some of the books being used to "teach" history, such as Professor Powell's, it is no wonder that they feel this way.

More than just an educational issue, the questions of curricular reform before us are moral ones as well. To remove the story of an entire race of human beings from the nation's history is to confine that group to second-class citizenship within that nation. The statistics from the SACIE and the NCES do not tell the entire story. Beyond those cold numbers are lives that have been short-changed by an incomplete narrative and a non-inclusive curriculum. Writing

about the effects of long-term suspensions, Chairwoman Maynor writes: "...the effects of suspension are far-reaching. These effects limit students...where they are expected to function well economically, to conduct healthy relationships with peers, and to contribute to society" (State Advisory Council on Indian Education, 2005, p. 16). It is apparent that becoming "visible" for American Indian students in North Carolina comes at an unacceptably high price.

Perhaps the story of Cherokee Removal does not warrant dozens of pages in a book that must cover the entire history of a state in one manageable volume. It is not too much to ask, though, that the material that does appear is accurate and reflects the magnitude of the tragedy that occurred to the Cherokee Nation and her people. The satiric piece with which I opened this article—the text box on the Holocaust—would almost certainly be found unacceptable and would generate an outcry were it real and part of any school book. Yet it is drawn carefully from Professor Powell's dealing with the removal of the Cherokee people from their homeland. Those who died during *Nunnadautsun't* deserve better; and those young men and women who are the product of over a century's worth of survival and determination deserve better. It must be the battle cry of devoted educators in North Carolina and in other states with American Indian populations that no student shall feel invisible. The crisis continues; the work will not wait.

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