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## The sounds of silence: American history textbook representations of non-violence and the Abolition Movement

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper we examine how the Abolition Movement's approach to non-violent resistance has been silenced in four American history textbooks. Despite extensive research that reveals an extensive network of groups dedicated to the peaceful abolishment of slavery little of this historical record is included in the textbooks. Instead, a skewed representation of the movement is conveyed to the reader, one that conveys an image of a movement that contributes to a climate of social violence. Through a critical discourse analytical approach to the data we carefully deconstruct how this process of misrepresentation occurs. By employing the discursive tools of narrative framing, positioning, and stance we lift up what is often hidden from the reader and demonstrate how language use communicates powerful social messaging to the reader. We argue that student readers are left with an impoverished sense of how non-violent democratic change has occurred when presented with a limited portrayal of the Abolition Movement. We therefore emphasize the importance of equipping students with the skills needed to critically interrogate both historical and contemporary sources that purports to convey the inevitability of war to resolve complex social problems; we maintain this is both an educational imperative and a civic obligation.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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Abolition Movement; history and peace education; silencing; critical discourse analysis; non-violent resistance

### Introduction

In this article we examine how the Abolition Movement's non-violent approaches to democratic change have been silenced in four American History textbooks. We argue that this leads to a very limited conception of political change and conflict resolution that is communicated to students. Despite scholarship that reveals a complex network of activists who engaged in peaceful forms of protest against the institutionalized violence of slavery, textbook accounts at best either understate the role of these efforts or at worst air brush them from historical memory. At the same time published scholarship beginning in the early twentieth century and through today has recognized that many of the discourses and actions by abolitionists emphasized a peaceful approach to the abolishment of slavery (Curti 1929; Demos 1964; Ziegler 2001).

Women and men who actively participated in the struggle against slavery spent a great deal of energy both condemning the institutionalized violence inherent in slavery and warning of the dehumanizing effects violent resistance had on those who engaged in it (Mabee 1970; Sklar 2000). There were variegated stances on what non-violent resistance meant to the leaders and members of abolitionist groups (Ziegler 2001).

A great deal of attention by scholars has been paid to the complex relationships between European-American and African-American abolitionists (Blackett 2002; Sklar and Stewart 2007). These figures and many others in the African-American community sought out alliances and avenues of resistance that often emphasized ideas and actions that promoted peaceful means of change (Drescher 2009; Hershberger 1999).

Scholarship also reveals the important relationships established between the abolition and peace movements during this period. These relationships had enduring effects beyond the abolition efforts before the Civil War. Ideas and strategies were exchanged that influenced organizing methods of similar groups up until this day. African-American and European-American abolitionists were in important conversation with international, regional, and local abolition/peace activists (McDaniel 2013). A remarkable feature of this work was how decentralized and yet well organized these peace and abolitionist societies were with each other across state and national boundaries.

This scholarship has been largely ignored in the textbook accounts. Our research examines both the consequences of these omissions and the ways textbook accounts refashion a skewed representation of the Abolition Movement to the reader.

## Literature review

Our research builds upon previous work done in the fields of history education and peace studies. We were especially interested in how these two fields could inform our critical examination of narrative representations of political violence<sup>1</sup> in American history textbooks.

## History education

Research in this field has shown that the teaching and learning of history in most countries has been part of nation-building projects aimed at shaping citizens' national identities (Carretero 2011; Carretero, Asensio, and Rodriguez-Moneo 2012; Foster and Crawford 2006; Nakou and Barca 2011; Seixas 2006). Abundant research has documented how history has been recurrently positioned in school curricula to provide celebratory accounts of the nations' past, which typically convey a single version of the nation and excludes or marginalizes the historical experience and perspectives of minority or alternative groups who do not fit the mold (Aldridge 2006; Loewen 2007; Stanley 2007). Regarding the specific topic of this paper, research demonstrates that history textbooks in the United States tend to be organized around moral motifs such as the advancement of progress and freedom, which frame the meaning of historical events (Epstein 2009; VanSledright 2011).

Many scholars argue that narrow and skewed representations of the past undermine a democratic culture (Barton and Levstik 2004, 2008; Nakou and Barca 2011). These dominant narratives alienate citizens who do not feel represented and generate a weak sense of civic agency and efficacy among excluded groups (Epstein 2009; Harris and Reynolds 2014). Further, textbooks accounts tend to provide very simplistic templates for explaining the past

(Carretero and Bermudez 2012). Thus, scholars in this tradition advocate for more inclusive and critical accounts that set the basis for culturally responsive teaching (Gay 2013; Nordgren and Johansson 2015) and introduce students to core concepts fundamental to historical inquiry, such as *evidence, causality, and significance*. These researchers argue that when students have sustained opportunities to practice employing these concepts they are more able to develop complex historical understandings of the past (Dickinson and Lee 2001; Seixas 2006; Scott 2013; Stearns, Seixas, and Wineburg 2000; VanSledright 2011; Wineburg 2001).

Of particular interest to our research is an emerging line of work that studies how history education in different countries deals with the violent past and their influences on the present (Barton 2001; Bekerman and Zembylas 2012; Cole 2007; McCully 2010). These authors discuss the cognitive and emotional challenges of teaching and learning about and from social violence and historical traumas. Yet, they argue that the avoidance or mystification of these violent episodes in the past only serves to sustain their oppressive and long-lasting effects and suppresses the potential for transformative learning that this difficult knowledge contains.

### **Peace studies**

Interesting research has occurred on the ways national violent conflicts have been valorized. This is apparent in studies done on media representations of violence aimed mostly at young male audiences where violence is seen as heroic (Anderson 2000; Gentile and Bushman 2012; Huesmann and Taylor 2006). In settings that purport to have a more educational emphasis, such as museums and memorials, research conducted in different countries have demonstrated a close linkage between how war is presented and remembered and its civic function in the present. The association between military victories and national honor has a pervasive hold on national sites of remembrance around the world (Dower 2012; Herborn and Hutchinson 2014; Marvin and Ingle 1996; Yamane 2009). In the past several decades alternative sites of remembrance have been created which focus on those who engaged in peaceful means of conflict resolution in their respective national histories (Bartkowski 2013). Nonetheless, these are far outnumbered by memory sites that promote the notion that peace and honor are achieved through valiant combat (Herborn and Hutchinson 2014). Furthermore, these depictions are often laced with racist and xenophobic overtones (Loewen 2007; Saideman and Ayers 2008).

Research on educational projects devoted to creating cultures of peace in the past and present (Boulding 2000; Farni 2014) undermine the notion of the inevitability of violence to resolve conflicts. These projects have ranged in focus from learning interpersonal conflict resolution strategies and ethical orientations involving respect for human dignity (Joseph and Mikel 2014) to community service programs aimed at healing the social consequences of violence (Jones et al. 2014) and to programs that include awareness building across cultures (Golan and Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014) that frequently stress working for social justice through non-violent change (Chenoweth and Stephan 2013; Johnson 2014).

There has been research in history education that has intersected with the field of peace studies. This is especially true in regards to research done in societies that have recently emerged from protracted violent conflicts. Studies done on how narratives of the past have fueled inter-ethnic tension and violence in the present have been particularly relevant to

our work (Adwan, Braon, and Naveh 2012; Niyozov and Anwaruddin 2014). Little research though has focused on how narratives of violence in the past exert a powerful hold on history materials in countries that are not necessarily labeled post-conflict societies, such as the United States.

While our study has been informed by work done in the fields of history education and peace studies, our research brings together aspects of these fields of inquiry in new ways. We seek to explore the types of social messaging found in history textbook accounts that hinder or enhance notions of non-violent resolution to conflicts and how representations of both violent and peaceful means toward conflict resolution attempt to shape student's civic and moral sensibilities in the present.

## Research design

### *Purposeful sample*

A qualitative research design (Maxwell 2013; Stake 2010) guided our data collection and analysis of four widely used American history textbooks. These are: *The American Pageant: A History of the American People* (Kennedy and Cohen 2009), *A People and a Nation: A History of the United States* (Norton et al. 2012), *Out of Many: A History of the American People* (Farragher et al. 2009), and *America: Pathways to the Present* (Cayton et al. 2009). For ease of readability, we use title acronyms (i.e. TAP, APAN, OOM, PTP) throughout this article. These textbooks were selected based upon our examination of national textbook adoptions trends (ATC 2011) and in consultation with high school history teachers and curriculum specialists from school districts in the Northeast and Midwestern United States. From a preliminary list, we chose four that represented some degree of diversity in reading levels and in perspective (based on how textbooks presented themselves).

### *Data analysis*

Our analysis of data employs a critical examination of social messaging embedded within these narratives. A critical approach dispenses with the notion of a 'neutral third person' guiding the narration within the textbook account (Fairclough 2010; Machin and Mayr 2012). Instead, we believe dominant thematic strands within the textbook accounts reflect to varying degrees the larger social/political/economic interests shaping the construction and presentation of narrative representations of violence. In this sense our approach is aligned with a critical discourse tradition that seeks to explain how narratives and particular forms of language use serve different social functions, such as framing the meaning of events and negotiating personal and collective identities (Billig 1987; Gee 2011; Harré and van Langenhove 1999; Wodak and Meyer 2009).

Our analysis focuses on specific discursive devices that operate within the accounts to communicate both explicit and implicit ideological messages to the reader. We employ the devices of *narrative framing, positioning, and stance* to conduct a fine-grained examination of the social purposes of language in the textbook coverage of the non-violent resistance to slavery (see Table 1). *Narrative framing* draws attention to how a topic is put together in order to allow the reader to identify with a familiar cultural story line, such as 'the triumph of courage through the face of adversity.' *Positioning* highlights which historical actors are

**Table 1.** Critical discourse analysis rubric.

Tool	Analytic questions
<p><i>Narrative framing</i> Sheds light on: Cultural narratives invoked by the author to make sense of an issue/event</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What themes are most salient?</li> <li>• How are the themes connected or disconnected from each other?</li> <li>• How is the narrative plot structured?</li> <li>• What is placed in the foreground/background?</li> </ul>
<p><i>Positioning</i> Sheds light on: Who is regarded as ‘us’/‘them’ How actors’ identities should be understood by the reader</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What historical actors are included/excluded?</li> <li>• How are actors’ identities represented?</li> <li>• Which historical actors are given prominence in the text and which ones are not?</li> <li>• Which actors are portrayed as violent perpetrators, victims, heroes, people of action, etc?</li> </ul>
<p><i>Stance</i> Sheds light on: What a text is arguing for or against Social and cultural goods are at stake</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What rhetorical stances does the author of the text adopt:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ ‘Taken for granted’ (no further elaboration)</li> <li>◦ Justification (qualifies claims)</li> <li>◦ Advocacy (attempts to persuade)</li> <li>◦ Challenge (counterarguments/questions)</li> <li>◦ Resistance (refuses claims)</li> </ul> </li> <li>◦ What is the tone of the account: polemical, authoritative, reflective, defensive?</li> </ul>

included or excluded, who is in the foreground or background, who is the ‘we’ and who is the ‘other,’ and how these actors are aligned to critical events within the narrative structure. Finally, the device of *stance* draws attention to what the text is arguing for (or against) and the tone that is used in making that argument. For example, does the text employ language that is polemical, academic, colloquial, and/or various combinations of these?

This analytical approach provides a precise understanding of how language use is employed to shape reader’s identities around the role of violence in resolving conflicts by comparing textbook accounts to scholarship conducted on the Abolition Movement to what occurs discursively in the textbook narratives.

## Findings

To varying degrees the four textbook accounts represent the Abolition Movement as contributing to a climate of violence that led to the Civil War. This representation effectively obscures or at times silences what was in fact an extensive and complex network of abolition and peace societies engaged in non-violent struggle to abolish slavery. A closer examination of the way this occurs in each account demonstrates the power of language to shape how an important historical episode of democratic change remains hidden to present-day readers.

### *The American Pageant*

TAP’s coverage of the Abolition Movement is spread throughout two chapters, ‘The South and the Slavery Controversy: 1789–1860’ (Chapter 16) and ‘Drifting Toward Disunion: 1854–1861’ (Chapter 19). Both chapters utilize a personality-based approach to position abolitionists as contributing to organized political violence that led to the Civil War.

Chapter 16 begins this process through its frequent use of the term *radical*. In this chapter well-known European-American and African-American figures such as William Lloyd Garrison,

David Walker, and Frederick Douglass fall under the category of 'radical'<sup>2</sup> abolitionists. The term *radical* is not explained, nor are distinctions made between different historical actors who are assigned this label. Instead, TAP employs personality traits to highlight differences between figures rather than any kind of serious explorations of substantive differences between their views. For example, Douglass is described as 'flexibly practical as Garrison was stubbornly principled' (352). The account does not examine the long-standing cooperation and alignment both men had, which would have provided the reader with a much more nuanced understanding of their similarities and differences in regard to their non-violent approach to abolishing slavery.

The chapter devotes most of its attention to Garrison as the principal historical actor associated with 'radical' abolitionism. He is depicted as 'the emotionally high strung son of a drunken father' who then grew up to be 'stern and uncompromising' (350). Hardly a sentence goes by in the chapter where there is not a negative adjective attributed to his character and actions. TAP positions Garrison and the above-mentioned personality traits as a metaphoric masthead for 'radical' abolitionism. Missing in the account are his many statements and exchanges with other national abolitionist figures and grass root activists who articulated stances of non-violence in their struggle to end slavery. For example, TAP could have included one of many Garrison's speeches and writings that condemned the use of violence, such as: 'The nonresistant pacifist must therefore return good for evil, forgive every injury and insult, without attempting by physical force to punish the transgressor' (DeBenedetti 1980, 41). Instead, the chapter equates 'radical' abolitionism with Garrison and in turn Garrison with inciting a climate of violence through his rhetoric.

The chapter mentions many instances of mob violence against 'radical' abolitionists, but these are represented as being caused by the rhetoric of Garrison and his followers: 'Repeated tongue-lashings by the extreme abolitionists provoked many mob outbursts in the North... ' (357). Garrison is positioned, and by proxy most abolitionists, as being a dangerous and unpopular menace to reasoned discourse and political unity.

The chapter ends with an information insert that describes some of the international efforts to end slavery. TAP notes that slavery was abolished in the Americas peacefully 'in stark contrast to the United States' (355). How that was accomplished in other countries is not explained. TAP alludes to the necessity of war in the United States case because 'the roots of the "peculiar institution" ran wide and deep' (355). With the following statement, 'it took the Union's victory in a bloody Civil War in 1865 to eradicate slavery once and for all' (355), it is implied that war was the only answer. The reader is left with a paradoxical message; the Abolition Movement is condemned for inciting violence that contributed to the events that led to the Civil War yet the text accepts that only a civil war could 'eradicate slavery.' Totally missing from the account is the centrality of non-violence to beliefs and actions of what TAP labels as 'radical' abolitionists.

The other TAP chapter, 'Drifting Toward Disunion' builds upon an emerging theme of the inevitability of war and the Abolition Movement's dual role of contributing to that inevitability while also being incapable of preventing it. The focus is on John Brown's violent anti-slavery campaigns in the 1850s. Brown replaces Garrison as the centerpiece for 'radical' abolitionism, though in fact Garrison and a network of non-violent anti-slavery and anti-war activists were very active in this decade and frequently denounced Brown's methods. TAP applies the label of *radical abolitionists* to both without noting the profound differences between them.

John Brown takes on a larger than life quality, and his personality traits become symptomatic, like Garrison's in the previous chapter, of a man unhinged, dangerous, and sowing fear throughout the nation. He is introduced to the reader as 'cold, humorless, intolerant, and egotistical' (400). Referring to his vigilante campaigns in Kansas the text states, 'The fanatical figure of John Brown now stalked upon the Kansas battlefield. Spare, gray bearded, and iron willed he was obsessively dedicated to the abolitionist cause' (399). Without stating explicitly an association to Garrison, the descriptors attached to Brown are reminiscent of the qualities attributed to Garrison two chapters earlier.

With its focus on Brown as representative of the Abolition Movement the reader encounters an even more sinister and terrifying image of the cause. The actions of Brown and his followers are deemed 'terrorist butchery ... that brought vicious retaliation from the proslavery forces' (399). By implication the actions of other non-violent resisters become symbolically aligned with Brown. When Charles Sumner, a prominent Massachusetts Senator and abolitionist, was physically assaulted by Preston Brooks, a pro-slavery Congressman, at his Senate desk, TAP characterized Sumner as having been 'provocatively insulting' in his 'abusive speech' (401) and Brooks as 'ordinarily gracious and gallant' (400). TAP's account points out that Brooks was 'in the wrong' (401), but without a further exploration of who Sumner was and what constituted provocative rhetoric, the reader comes away with a sort of moral equivalency between the abolitionist advocates and slavery supporters.

The central positioning of Garrison and Brown within TAP's narrative creates a vague sense of a movement that is escalating out of control. By depicting a complex social movement through the personality traits of these two men the reader gets no or little sense that there were differences between what and how Garrison and Brown defined the abolitionist cause. The voices and actions of people beyond these two figures are largely absent and irrelevant to events leading up to the Civil War. We have no idea how members of the American Anti-Slavery Society or the New England Non-Resistant Society advocated for principled and non-violent resistance to slavery and all forms of violence. We do get a generalized and decontextualized representation of the Abolition Movement as an extension of the violence provoking personalities of William Garrison and John Brown.

### **American pathways to the present**

PTP's coverage of the Abolition Movement is confined to Chapter 3, 'An Evolving New Nation: 1783–1861.' Its reading level is the simplest of all four texts and while TAP relies on extensive personality attribution to historical actors, PTP sparsely mentions only a few individuals. Instead, the Abolition Movement is placed within a larger sweep of events that seem to March lock step to an inevitable outcome – the advent of the Civil War.

Because the narrative frame de-centers the primacy of central historical figures to guide the reader's attention there is less florid language appearing within the text. Furthermore, the term *radical* is employed only twice. It first appears when it introduces Garrison to the reader. 'One of the most famous of the radical abolitionists was a white Bostonian named William Lloyd Garrison' (130). While there is scant examination of who Garrison was and what he stood for, the text does state, 'he denounced moderation in the fight against slavery' (130).

PTP quickly mentions that Garrison favored women's inclusion into anti-slavery meetings and his condemnation of the American Constitution's support of slavery, but nothing more

is said about these views except in a sentence stating, 'Abolitionists who disagreed with Garrison formed the Liberty Party in 1840' (131). After this point his name does not come up again, and the next reference to the Abolition Movement pertains to the usage of the term *radical*. The text states, 'In the decades before the Civil War, most white Americans viewed abolitionism as a radical idea, even in the North' (131). This sentence is quickly followed up by 'Opposition to the abolitionists eventually became violent' (131). There is no more detail about the nature of this violence.

When the Abolition Movement is referred to again eight pages later, it is under a side bar heading 'Violence in the Capital' (140). Here PTP briefly describes the attack on Charles Sumner in the United States Senate. Like TAP, PTP emphasizes the 'bold insults' (140) Sumner made against Preston Brooks. The attack on Sumner, while not justified, is made more understandable because we see a 'radical' abolitionist not acting with 'moderation.' The reader is not presented with portions of his speech and nor is there any contextualization of the rhetorical styles employed by public figures in this era, which often times were infused with a sense of Christian righteousness, not unique to any one person, reform movement, or set of views (Vetter 2015).

The final reference to the Abolition Movement occurs two pages later when John Brown is introduced for the first time. The focus is on his armed raid of the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia in 1859. We learn little of Brown's views, except his desire to 'seize weapons and give them to enslaved people to start a slave uprising' (142). This statement is followed by quoting Brown when he declares '... the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away; but with Blood' (142). With that quote there is no more coverage of the Abolition Movement in the chapter. The reader, left with Brown's quote pointing toward the inevitability of war, is not given access to the numerous dissenting voices at the time that argued against engaging in violent conflict or to the range of alternative choices political leaders could have made to avoid war.

The coverage of the Abolition Movement in PTP is minimal and embedded in a sweep of events that lead up to the Civil War. The Abolition Movement is one of many sub headings that frame the narrative of the chapter, providing a sort of listing of facts that the reader should take away. Yet, within this sea of somewhat disjointed topical headings the glimpses we have of the movement are those anchored in the terms and images of a movement prone to intolerance and fiery rhetoric. There is absolutely no mention of networks of associations or an evolving discourse on the moral principles of peace and non-violent resistance to slavery. The informational tone of the text and the stance of the narrative toward the Abolition Movement within all this information is that of a movement that in the very least did nothing to bring people together and at worst foreshadowed the mass violence of the Civil War.

### ***Out of Many: A History of the American People***

OOM provides a greater amount of coverage to the Abolition Movement than do TAP or PTP. Chapter 13, 'Meeting the Challenges of the New Age,' and Chapter 15, 'The Coming Crisis: The 1850s' present a few aspects of the Abolition Movement in greater depth and with more historical context. Also, the reading level is more sophisticated, and OOM employs a more complex narrative frame and positioning of the historical actors. The narrative voice is more didactic and conveys a tone of academic authority the way it positions people and events.

At the same time the Abolition Movement's stances toward non-violence are silenced while its association with violent rhetoric and actions is highlighted.

OOM begins its coverage of the Abolition Movement by describing social reform campaigns, such as temperance, prison, and public education. It makes a point of emphasizing the moralistic and religiously inspired rhetoric within these movements, which were qualities exhibited in abolitionists' speech and writings. At the same time it also provides a skewed representation of the movement's stance toward violence. This is seen immediately in OOM categorizing the movement as three distinct groups, 'African Americans, Quakers, and militant white reformers' (342). In this representation William Lloyd Garrison and Elijah Lovejoy join the ranks of 'militants,' but African-American abolitionists such as Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass do not, nor do Quaker abolitionists Angela Grimké and George William Benson. Because 'militant' is not defined the reader assumes this categorization into three groups represents hard lines of difference, which was not true, especially in regard to their beliefs in using non-violent democratic change to abolish slavery. All of these historical actors worked together at various points of time in either the New England Resistance Society and/or the American Anti-Slavery Society.

We see this pattern again with OOM's depiction of Garrison. On the one hand OOM duly notes that his style of speaking and writing was partially derivative of oratorical styles found in the religious revival movements of this era. Yet, their use of the term *radical* is reified as some static, essentialized trait with negative overtones. The reader soon gets a better sense of its meaning when OOM states millions of anti-slavery tracts were published by the 'militant' abolitionists. OOM mentions they were 'confrontational, denunciatory, and personal' (344) in their condemnation of slavery even though many if not most of these publications advocated the importance of not replacing one form of violence with another form of violence in its efforts to abolish slavery. OOM suggests that mob anti-abolitionist violence is due to 'radical' abolitionists aggressively and stridently pressing their cause.

By the end of Chapter 13 OOM's stance toward the Abolition Movement becomes more explicitly negative. What it had labeled as three groups of abolitionists now merge into one that is increasingly futile in its efforts to win the hearts and minds of the American public. The text argues, 'Although abolitionist groups raised the nation's emotional temperature, it clearly failed to achieve the moral unity they had hoped for...' (345). In the conclusion to the chapter OOM introduces a theme that it will carry over into Chapter 15; that the Abolition Movement's rhetoric reflects 'an uncompromising' nature that afflicted many of the reform groups of the era, preventing it from achieving its goals and in turn sowing the seeds for disunity in the country. OOM states, 'A striking aspect of these associations was the uncompromising nature of the attitudes and beliefs on which they were based. Most groups were formed of like-minded people who wanted to impose their will on others. Such intolerance boded ill for the future' (347).

While the Abolition Movement is not named explicitly here, it is clear by this point to the reader it is one of those 'uncompromising' groups.

An overarching theme that frames Chapter 15 is that of fixed positions by different groups preventing political compromises. 'These vastly different visions of the North and South had become fixed, and the chances of national reconciliation increasingly slim' (386). No group exemplified better the fixed and dogmatic positions of sectional politics that led to the Civil War than the Abolition Movement. So, in OOM's coverage of The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 the attention is drawn away from the immorality and oppression intrinsic to the law and

toward the actions of ‘armed abolitionists’ in Boston who try to rescue Anthony Burns from being returned to slavery in the South. While some protesters had knives and clubs, armed soldiers escorting Burns to a slave ship exhibited the overwhelming amount of force. Furthermore, Garrison and other non-violent abolitionists never advocated violence to free Burns. None of this is mentioned in the account. Instead, OOM simply concludes that ‘Northern protests against the Fugitive Slave Law bred suspicion in the South and encouraged secessionist thinking’ (387).

The next mention of abolitionism is with John Brown. Like in the other textbooks Garrison fades out of the picture, as do all other historical actors and networks that were protesting mob violence and violent resistance to slavery during the 1850s. Brown takes center stage as the leader of ‘militant abolitionism,’ as seen in the following passage stating ‘... a grim, old man named John Brown led his sons in a raid of proslavery settlers killing five unarmed people. A wave of violence ensued. Armed bands roamed the countryside, and burnings and killings became commonplace...’ (390). Brown serves as an extreme manifestation of the alleged heated rhetoric of abolitionists through his violent campaigns. OOM states Brown is the ‘the self-appointed avenger who had slaughtered unarmed proslavery men in Kansas in 1856’ (395) and as a result of his Harper’s Ferry attack had become a hero to many. ‘By many’ OOM means abolitionists in particular, mentioning how ‘abolitionists issued eulogies’ (396) upon his execution. Missing in this representation were the many debates among abolitionists about his approach to end slavery through the use of vigilante violence (Curti 1929; Demos 1964; Mabee 1970).

OOM concludes the chapter with the message of a divided nation on the eve of the Civil War, brought to that point by the futile efforts of political compromises. The Abolition Movement is one of these groups that undermined compromise. The war becomes inevitable, but there is nothing to inform the reader that the abolitionists tried to prevent that inevitability.

### ***A People and a Nation***

Of all four of the textbook accounts, APAN provides the most complex representation of the Abolition Movement. Historical actors are positioned within overlapping networks of reform groups that make an impact on the nation’s moral conscience and policies. For much of its coverage it avoids facile generalizations when labels such as *radical* are employed. However, as the narrative develops over two chapters this complexity begins to break down, and APAN fails to properly differentiate between ‘radical’ abolitionists, such as John Brown, and those espousing non-violence. In the end APAN’s stance toward the Abolition Movement and its relationship to violence are ambiguous, offering hints that perhaps parts of the movement embraced a non-violent approach to democratic change.

APAN’s coverage of the Abolition Movement begins with Chapter 12, ‘Reform and Politics: 1824–1845,’ which is largely focused on the impact social reform movements had on American society in the first half of the nineteenth century. In this sense it is similar to OOM with its emphasis on describing the varied movements that existed before and along with the Abolition Movement. The coverage in APAN is more nuanced however, capturing themes that are picked up later in its examination of the Abolition Movement. For example, they note the role these movements played for marginalized groups in American society ‘at a time when the vote was restricted to property-owning men’ (309).

By the time APAN explicitly discusses the abolitionists they immediately point out that ‘their efforts built on an earlier generation of antislavery activism’ (314). The labels of *evangelical* and *radical abolitionism* are used, but with more explanation than in the previous three textbooks. For example, ‘radical’ is not equated with violence when Garrison and other non-violent abolitionists are introduced to the reader. APAN states, ‘Violent overthrow did not figure in the goals of white abolitionists after the American Revolution. . . with its large population of Quakers whose religious beliefs emphasized human equality’ (314). This is soon followed up by the sentence, ‘In the early 1830s, a new group of more radical white abolitionists – most prominently William Lloyd Garrison–rejected both the violent overthrow advocated by David Walker and the gradual approaches of white legal reformers and colonizationists’ (314). This representation is very different from other accounts. Distinctions are made between different wings of the abolition movement, and Garrison and the ‘more radical white abolitionists’ are not demonized or laden with negative personality based language.

Rather than an emphasis on strident and uncompromising language APAN chooses to foreground the ideas of non-violence, moral suasion, and equality. For instance the text states, ‘Garrison advocated “moral suasion”’. ‘He and his followers hoped to bring about emancipation not through coercion, but by winning the hearts of slave owners as well as others. . . Evangelical abolitionism depended on large numbers of ministers and laypeople spreading the evangelical message across the nation’ (315). It also notes the movement was not simply controversial and shunned by most Americans by telling the reader that the AAS had more than 3,00,000 members by 1838 and had chapters throughout the northern states and territories. Women members led and organized postal campaigns, petitions, and anti-slavery fairs, which ‘increased their cause’s visibility and drew more Americans into direct contact with abolitionists and their ideas’ (317). APAN’s narrative presents the Abolition Movement as an effective and progressive minded reform group that had a wide appeal in many parts of the country.

The issue of mob violence is also presented in a different light than the other accounts. APAN notes that the Abolition Movement’s ‘very success gave rise to a virulent, even violent, opposition’ (317). The text goes on to state that hundreds of attacks occurred in the North and South, but the focus is not on the provocative rhetoric seen in the other accounts but on the vulnerability of those attacked. The culpability for violence shifts to those who perpetrated the attacks. Also, APAN points out that merchants and bankers in the North, who benefited economically from slavery, ‘incited anti-abolitionist riots’ (317). Unlike the other three accounts there is at least some reference to underlying social and economic factors that contributed to a climate of violence.

APAN positions the ‘radical’ abolitionist cause as part of a larger international anti-slavery network, highlighting the role of African-American abolitionists in this network, ‘American abolitionism in the 1830s was invigorated by the militancy of black abolitionists’ (316). Here, though ‘militancy’ is not associated with reckless mob violence but with speeches, writing, and organizing done with other European partners which aided a ‘worldwide antislavery movement as advocates of women’s rights, international peace, temperance, and other reforms . . . around the world’ (316).

In Chapter 14, ‘Slavery and America’s Future: The Road to War, 1845–1861,’ the nuanced and complex representation of the Abolition Movement falters somewhat, especially in relation to the vigilante violence of John Brown. One begins to see a conflation of terms and

less distinctions made between different historical actors and wings of the abolitionist movement.

The first signs of this appear in the coverage of the *Fugitive Slave Act*. APAN does state how 'abolitionist newspapers attacked the Fugitive Slave Act as a violation of fundamental American rights' (371), raising important ethical questions about the legitimacy of this law for American democracy. Then, it notes that 'violent resistance to slave catchers' (371) began to occur in northern towns by abolitionists. 'Many abolitionists became convinced by their experience of resisting the *Fugitive Slave Act* that violence was a legitimate means of opposing slavery' (371). While true to a certain extent, many abolitionists also did not believe that violence was necessary and continued to press for a non-violent approach to helping slaves win their freedom. That discourse is missing from the chapter.

APAN does recognize the role that an 'illegal network of civil disobedience' (371) played in the creation and maintenance of The Underground Railroad. While not explicitly stating that almost all of the African and European-American agents in this complex network saw this as a non-violent alternative form of resistance, APAN implies it with such sentences as 'numerous white abolitionists, often Quakers, joined with blacks as agents of black liberation' (372). We do not see The Underground Railroad as a topic in the coverage in the other three textbook accounts.

Once coverage begins with the actions of John Brown and his followers the narrative frame and the stance toward the Abolition Movement shifts. Brown is labeled a 'radical abolitionist' who led 'armed bands of guerillas who roamed the territory' murdering and mutilating victims (377). This is a departure from the previous chapter where 'radical' meant quite a different thing. Juxtaposed next to John Brown is Charles Sumner who is depicted as 'radical in his anti-slavery views' (378). The reader does not know if he is 'radical' in the sense of a John Brown or 'radical' in the sense of Garrison or Angela Grimké. This representation is somewhat confusing for the reader.

In the section on the Harpers Ferry attack, APAN mentions that John Brown had a 'distinctive vision of abolitionism' and believed 'violence in a righteous cause was a holy act' (380–381). This does seem to set him apart from others, but APAN does not elaborate on this point. The text says he garnered a great deal of support from 'prominent abolitionists' (381), but here again the reader does not get a sense that many other abolitionists condemned his use of violence as a method to overthrow slavery. In fact, in the chapter's conclusion APAN states the 'radical abolitionist John Brown' is a major contributor to why southerners and northerners saw 'each other in conspiratorial terms' (385). Despite warning the reader about understanding the Civil War as an inevitable outcome of 'big events,' the chapter concludes with the sentence that 'emotions bound up in attacking and defending slavery's future were too powerful and the interests it affected too vital for a final compromise' (385). This is an ambiguous statement. Part of the sentence alludes to heated and intolerant passions (aka, John Brown v pro-slavery forces) and part to what one would assume to be the financial and political elites who benefited from slavery. It is unfortunate that the last coverage of the Abolition Movement rests with John Brown's legacy. This stance undercuts a previous narrative that was characterized by more complex portrayals of historical actors and the networks they created, which at least gave readers some indirect sense that non-violent resistance formed part of many abolitionists beliefs and actions.

### ***Patterns of representation in the four textbooks***

While all four accounts presented an incomplete representation of the Abolition Movement's approach to non-violent democratic change, there were differences in how each textbook depicted the movement. These differences and similarities can be seen within the framework of the three discursive devices we employed in our analysis: *narrative frame*, *positioning*, and *stance*. As the matrix demonstrates (see Table 2), these qualities vary in intensity along a scale of 4 (most intense) to 1 (least intense). The matrix and scale do not represent an exact measurement of qualities but rather are offered to convey an approximation of degrees of intensity.

#### ***Narrative frame: war as a foregone conclusion***

All four textbooks conveyed a sense that the Civil War was a foregone conclusion, and the structure of the narratives proceeded along a trajectory that made this appear as an inevitable outcome. TAP and OOM stood out in this regard. As different as PTP and APAN were in their reading levels and amount of coverage allotted to the Abolition Movement, the quality of inevitability of war was not as strong, especially with APAN. APAN made a point of stating that events and choices were not predetermined, but by the end of the second chapter the text represented the Abolition Movement as one of the factors that contributed to this outcome. The coverage of PTP was so abbreviated and choppy that it was hard to discern a coherent narrative strand. Yet, the inevitability of war is implied within the linear progression of events assembled in a sort of factoid fashion.

Within each of the textbooks the Abolition Movement is placed as a key factor that contributes to the outbreak of large-scale violence. It is not represented as a force that is working to prevent war. TAP and OOM's narrative make that clear to the reader, while it is more obscure in PTP and APAN for the reasons just noted. In no instance do any of the accounts stress the Abolition Movement's views and actions as making any kind of impact on the political culture in relation to the dangers of resorting to violent means to abolish slavery.

#### ***Positioning: abolitionists contribute to a climate of violence***

All textbooks employ the label of *radical* to describe key historical actors of the Abolition Movement. Only APAN is noticeably different in this regard. For most of the narrative APAN makes distinctions between 'radical' abolitionists, such as Garrison and Brown, while also providing explanations for how these terms are employed. Furthermore, APAN does the most to mention and imply that non-violent views were important to many movement members and when violence occurred in the decades before the Civil War the 'radical' abolitionists were not primarily blamed for these outbreaks. As our analysis revealed, however, by the end of APAN's narrative this attention to nuance breaks down when John Brown's actions are given greater prominence in the narrative.

At the other end of the continuum, TAP makes little distinctions between 'radical' abolitionists and provides negative representations, based on personality traits that motivate the actions of historical figures. OOM seems to initially engage in a more complex representation of the movement, but as the narrative progresses increasing attention is placed upon the alleged violent rhetoric of abolitionists for provoking mob violence. PTP very well might



**Table 2.** Discursive representations of the abolition movement.

Discursive devices	The American Pageant (TAP)	Out of Many (OOM)	Pathways to the Present (PTP)	A People and a Nation (APAN)
Narrative framing	<p>War as forgone conclusion (4)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Abolition Movement key to constructing narrative's sense of inevitability of war</li> </ul>	<p>War as forgone conclusion (3)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Abolition Movement plays increasing role in narrative's build up to violence leading to Civil War</li> </ul>	<p>War as forgone conclusion (2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Narrative is choppy laden with information bullets leading to war; Abolition Movement embedded in this progression</li> </ul>	<p>War as forgone conclusion (1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Narrative conclusion emphasizes war was not inevitable but text suggests Abolition Movement was one factor in its outbreak-message ambiguous</li> </ul>
Positioning	<p>Abolitionists contribute to climate of violence (4)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Negative personality traits attributed to key 'radical' abolitionists, lack of distinction between historical actors</li> </ul>	<p>Abolitionists contribute to climate of violence (3)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some complexity in representation of actors but negative associations increase in narrative</li> </ul>	<p>Abolitionists contribute to climate of violence (2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Few historical actors but emphasis on 'radical' John Brown and his violence</li> </ul>	<p>Abolitionists contribute to climate of violence (1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most sophisticated representation of abolitionists, acknowledge non-violence views but obscured by end of narrative</li> </ul>
Stance	<p>Abolition Movement Undermines National Unity (4)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use of colloquial language makes case for abolitionists as dangerous provocateurs</li> </ul>	<p>Abolition Movement Undermines National Unity (3)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measured and academic appearance to argument about role Abolition Movement plays in break up of union</li> </ul>	<p>Abolition Movement Undermines National Unity (2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tone of an adult telling 'facts' to a child but message not clear but implication is movement element in break up of union</li> </ul>	<p>Abolition Movement Undermines National Unity (1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Also, more of an academic voice here; Abolition Movement is one of many factors contributing to break up of union</li> </ul>

Note: Degree of Emphasis Scale: 4= Most; 1= Least.

have a similar representation as OOM or TAP, but the brevity of the coverage of the movement and its historical actors make it hard to discern where it falls in this category. Still, there is explicit mention of 'radical' abolitionists with a negative association, especially in regards to violence and John Brown.

The extensive historical record discussing the varied stances on non-violence and the discussions between members of the movement about if and when violence should ever be employed is absent from all the accounts. The brief mention of the international abolition and peace societies in APAN does not provide the reader with any sense of how widespread and rich the discourse on peace and non-violence was in the movement.

### ***Stance: the Abolition Movement undermines national unity***

The theme of division and disunity runs through all four accounts, as they associate the growing discord among the regions of the country, particularly around the issue of slavery, as a threat to national unity. To some degree all four accounts claim that the Abolition Movement undermined the national unity of the country. All of the accounts assume that a strong union is a core American value, almost eclipsing the prominence given to the destructive influence of slavery. In these chapters where the Abolition Movement appears, it is the social good attached to a unified United States that is paramount. Against the backdrop of this value, the Abolition Movement is represented and evaluated in terms of the degree to which it enhanced or undermined national unity, and all four accounts have the movement associated with the break up of the union much more than to its contribution in generating ethical and practical arguments against slavery. In this sense, the discursive stance in all four textbooks is to take the value of national unity for granted and to question the Abolition Movement for undermining it. This ideological message is similar in all of the accounts, but the tone varies in intensity. The strident rhetoric and provocative actions emphasized in TAP are much more muted in APAN, but all the accounts associate the Abolition Movement with the break up of the Union.

The three discursive devices do not operate in isolation from one another. We highlight them separately to emphasize their particular functions within the accounts. In fact, they are intertwined in the process of silencing and/or understating the non-violence views and actions of the Abolition Movement.

### **Implications of textbook findings for teaching and learning**

The findings from our analysis of the four textbook representation of the Abolition Movement underscore the importance of providing students with access to evolving historical scholarship and equipping them with skills to critically analyze historical discourses. Without these resources and skills students are limited in their ability to interrogate national history accounts in a sophisticated manner. While the scope of this study is limited to an analysis of four textbook accounts of one particular historical episode, the findings raise important questions about how historical representations of political violence attempt to shape student civic identities in the present.

### ***Shaping conceptions of non-violent approaches to conflict and political participation***

The limited and skewed coverage of the Abolition Movement in the four textbooks diminishes students' understanding of what was achieved by those activists who embraced non-violent approaches to abolishing slavery. Even the accounts that provide more historical context and descriptive detail about the movement, such as OOM and APAN, provide no substantive discussion of the rich moral discourse, organizational tactics and networks, and legacies that influenced future peace and civil rights movements.

Student readers are deprived of the fascinating and important debates and discussions that characterized so many of the 'radical' African and European-American abolitionists in the 1830s through the 1850s. As scholarship has documented, many ethical questions were raised about if and when violence could be used to abolish slavery. Should there ever be an occasion when it is employed? If it is used, how does that affect the character of those who engage in it? What are other effective ways of resolving deep conflicts that do not involve violent means? These questions were openly discussed in church halls, abolitionist newspapers, and at national and international conferences. They were widespread and not confined to a small band of 'radical' true believers in New England. Conveying even a small sense of these discourses to students would provide a greater appreciation of the depth of thought and commitment to what we today would term issues of human rights.

The extensive networks of communication and organization for disseminating non-violent approaches to political change are not apparent in the four textbooks. This goes beyond The Underground Railroad mentioned in APAN. The tactics of letter writing, petitions, and lobbying so briefly mentioned in APAN and OOM deserve fuller treatment. Three of the accounts (PTP, OOM, and APAN) note how women's involvement in the abolition movement overlapped with the struggle for women's rights. APAN provides the most in depth coverage, citing their role in organizing letter writing, petitions, and fundraising to support the abolition cause. What was not discussed in any of the accounts was how these efforts centered around a grass roots and non-violent approach to democratic political change. Students get no sense of how effective and complex these organizational tactics were in pushing elected officials to take a more aggressive stance in condemning slavery. Learning about the ways abolition societies organized and communicated across the country and Atlantic in an age before mass communication fosters an appreciation for what ordinary citizens could accomplish at the time. This is not just learning more about William Lloyd Garrison or Fredrick Douglass; it recognizes the involvement of thousands of community-based activists who contributed to the movement at all levels. This type of coverage could provide students with another form of political participation that goes beyond a focus on the formal institutions of government.

Finally, the representation of the movement, as one that inflamed violent sensibilities in the nation that led to the Civil War, silences the important legacies that were generated at the time. Rather than being left with the image of John Brown as the face of a failed violent vigilante attempt to foment slave uprisings students could be left with an examination of how the moral discourse and political organization of non-violent abolitionists influenced generations to come. There is no discussion in any of the accounts of how ideas from the abolition and peace movements influenced the formation of the League of Nations or how they influenced the development of human rights principles in different phases of the

twentieth century civil rights movements. If some of the scholarship and documentation of this legacy was included, then students could develop a more complex understanding of the movement's place in American history, one that complicates their thinking on how change occurs.

Arguing for a more complete inclusion of the historical record of the Abolition Movement into textbook accounts and other forms of educational media is not asking that the movement be romanticized. In fact, a more robust and sophisticated treatment of a range of historical actors and organizational positions and actions fosters a more nuanced understanding of the history of the Abolition Movement. At the same time when students are left with a limited and/or distorted representation of the movement it impoverishes students' understanding of what non-violent political change meant at the time and its relevance to the history of the United States.

### ***Discursive tools needed for student readers of all accounts***

The critical discourse analysis approach utilized in this study of the four American History textbooks offers promise for students when reading a range of accounts, both historical and contemporary. Our use of three discursive devices to analyze how the Abolition Movement's approach to non-violence was represented points to powerful pedagogical uses for teachers and students. By helping students slow down and carefully parse through the narrative frame and language of an account allows them to decode social messaging that is often missed by readers of all ages. Providing students with the skill sets to identify how figures in an account are positioned (foreground/background, positive/negative attributes, etc.) and how the stance of the text communicates an ideological view (based on what it takes for granted, justifies, questions, challenges, etc.) enables them to become more reflexive about what they read and how they orient themselves in the world.

We have argued that a critical discourse analysis of the selected historical textbooks revealed some of the discursive techniques by which the examined accounts silenced and/or understated the representation of the non-violence principles and actions of the Abolition Movement in American history. Seeing what is hidden, lifting it up for analysis, and thinking through the purposes of particular discourses extends beyond the analysis of this particular topic. Students encounter a countless barrage of ideological messaging through mainstream and social media. Equipping them with these analytical tools is an empowering act. They can be an important set of skills for examining how historical narratives (and other forms of social discourse) attempt to construct national and civic identities.

We are not arguing that adapting versions of CDA for student use is in and of itself the best or only way to enhance the teaching and learning of history. For example, the use of CDA in school classrooms is augmented when it accompanies rigorous exploration of historical sources. When students have access to evolving scholarship and primary source material, they are better able to compare and contrast varied representations of the same historical episodes. If students have this kind of access and exposure to historical understanding concepts, such as *evidence*, *causality*, and *significance*, then their chances of becoming critical thinkers and civic participants in the world are greatly enhanced (Bermudez 2015). So, when a label of 'radical' is attached to an historical actor in a textbook or blog article on the web, a student would know how that label is being used to convey an ideological message to the reader. The student could then compare that representation to a range of

historical and contemporary source material. This kind of knowledge construction does not need to occur in graduate university courses but can be adapted by thoughtful teachers working with diverse student populations.

### *Shaping civic identities in a trans-national world*

The silencing of the Abolition Movement's positions and actions toward non-violent democratic change is more than just a misrepresentation of the historical record. To different degrees all four textbook accounts claimed the movement contributed to a climate of violence that led to the inevitability of the Civil War. It was represented as a causal factor in the dissolution of the Union. The four accounts converged around the dominant narrative of the necessity of a brutal war to restore the union and abolish slavery. Students are left with a sense, as awful as the war was, that it was the only realistic way to resolve the conflicts between North and South, which were made worse by the inflammatory rhetoric and increasingly violent actions of the Abolition Movement.

While this sense and impression of the movement is not supported by historical scholarship, it nonetheless operates on a powerful emotional and social level. As discussed, students get no sense of the importance of the non-violent ethical principles and political organizations informed by those principles when reading the textbook accounts. This raises important questions that bring together historical and civic knowledge formation. As our international study shows, textbook accounts of nine historical topics in three different countries frame violent conflicts as necessary and inevitable outcomes in the historical evolution of the nation.<sup>3</sup> What does that mean for students' civic identity in the present? Our research has also examined how the same four textbooks represented the forced migrations of Native American populations ('The Trail of Tears') and the ongoing 'War on Terrorism.' In each of these examples the theme of the inevitability of violent conflict and even its necessity runs through the dominant narratives of all the accounts. Also, in each example peaceful means for resisting violence associated with these historical episodes have been silenced or marginalized within the dominant narrative.

The examination we have conducted on these three examples communicate to the reader a seductive theme; the growth of the nation and its ultimate security require organized political violence to ensure either the defense of freedom and/or the security of the nation. As described earlier, research on American history textbooks have highlighted the persistent themes of the defense of freedom, the March of progress, and the exceptional role of the United States in protecting democracy at home and promoting it in the world. Our research suggests that the centrality and necessity of organized political violence is embedded within these dominant narrative strands. And, as a result, notions of peaceful and non-violent change as alternatives to catastrophic wars are marginalized or silenced for the reader.

Clearly, further research is needed across multiple, national educational accounts to explore the argument we are making. At the same time from our limited sample of four textbooks and our focus on one historical example, we argue that students are deprived of the opportunity to critically examine the role non-violence played in promoting democratic change. Without that exposure they are likely to subscribe to a worldview that accepts, however tragically, the practical reality of war and organized political violence when one's nation is a primary participant in a conflict. In an increasingly interconnected and intercultural world this orientation becomes problematic at best. Of course, textbooks are only one

source shaping national identities among citizens, perhaps a limited one at that, but these findings should give us pause. How possible is it for students to read about, interrogate, and reflect upon the meaning of non-violent social justice movements, such as the Abolition Movement, as a means to shape the course of history and affect our lives today? It is both an educational question but also one with profound ethical and political ramifications for how students become civic actors in a transnational world today.

## Notes

1. *Political violence* is understood as the 'reliance on organized violence as a defensible means' for achieving political, social or economic goals (Barash and Webel 2002).
2. We insert single quotes around 'radical' when referring to the textbook use of the term. This is done to emphasize how the term is appropriated by these accounts to convey a generally negative meaning.
3. Reference to be provided after blind review of this paper.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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