

# How Southern Politicians Reformed Textbooks to Resist Civil Rights Demands

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## ABSTRACT

How do political elites react when historically marginalized groups mobilize, gain political voice, and demand institutional reforms? This study explores this question by analyzing state-level curriculum reform in the U.S. South following the Civil Rights Movement. To assess whether curriculum policy was responsive to Black activists' demands, I compare changes in the content of state-approved history textbooks from around 1955 to 1975 in Alabama, Indiana, and California. The analysis reveals that, while non-Southern textbooks evolved to better reflect Black activists' curriculum demands, Alabama textbooks largely retained narratives that minimized or erased the history of racial discrimination. The findings highlight how, even in democracies, curricula can be used as a tool of social control to promote the notion that there is nothing wrong with the status quo. The theory and findings shed light on the conditions under which elites are likely to resist curriculum reforms that acknowledge historical racial inequalities.

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When Black Americans fought for equal rights during the 1950s and 1960s and became enfranchised following the Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965, Southern politicians faced a choice: adapt public policies to address the demands of this newly empowered constituency or find ways to maintain existing power structures despite formal political changes. This tension — between democratic responsiveness and elite resistance — exemplifies a fundamental question in political economy: How do those in power react when historically excluded groups mobilize and gain political voice? Traditional political economy models predict that politicians seeking to win elections will adjust public policies so that they better align with new voters' preferences and demands (Downs, 1957; Meltzer and Richard, 1981). An alternative perspective posits that when political elites fear that accommodating these demands will undermine their power, they may respond strategically by advancing policies and institutions aimed at preserving the existing distribution of power (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006; Albertus and Menaldo, 2018; Paglayan, 2024).

Past research paints a complex picture of how the Civil Rights Movement and the legislation it spurred affected the lives of Black people and the distribution of economic and political power in the US South. On one hand, the VRA undercut decades of voter suppression, boosted Black voter registration and turnout, and increased the number of Black elected officials (Bernini *et al.*, 2023; Bullock III and Gaddie, 2009; Davidson and Grofman, 1994; Fresh, 2018), which led to improvements in Black individuals' labor market outcomes and economic status (Aneja and Avenancio-Leon, Forthcoming). Moreover, court rulings and federal laws induced Southern school districts to desegregate (Cascio *et al.*, 2008). But there was also backlash: white supremacists responded to desegregation with violence against Blacks (Mickey, 2015), many white families left desegregated school systems (Kruse, 2005; Reber, 2005), and the VRA prompted white elites to eliminate many elected offices in Southern counties with politically active Black populations (Komisarchik, forthcoming), hurt the Democratic Party's performance in presidential and gubernatorial elections due to increased turnout and backlash among racially conservative white citizens (Ang, 2019; Fresh, 2018), and increased the incarceration of Black people in white communities of the South (Eubank and Fresh, 2022). In other words, the history of the US South features instances of both responsiveness *and* resistance to the mobilization and enfranchisement of Black people.

This study examines the tension between democratic responsiveness and elite resistance during the Civil Rights Movement through a new lens: the

curriculum policy choices of Southern states. The Civil Rights Movement and the enfranchisement of Black Americans following the VRA prompted Southern state governments to increase education expenditures in counties with a high proportion of Black residents. This finding is carefully documented by Cascio and Washington (2014), who interpret this as evidence that the enfranchisement of Black people led Southern state-level politicians to become more *responsive* to their educational demands. The redistribution of state-level education funds toward predominantly Black counties, Cascio and Washington (2014, p. 423) argue, “suggests that the VRA provided substantive, rather than merely symbolic, political gains for Southern blacks.”

However, recent research on the historical political economy of education systems suggests a profoundly different potential interpretation: perhaps state-level politicians invested in Black children’s education to bolster their efforts in social control. Indeed, across Western Europe and Latin America, political rulers throughout history have responded to mass mobilization by investing in education as an instrument for forging future citizens’ acceptance of the status quo. In these contexts, investment in mass schooling does not seek to address substantive grievances. Instead, its goal is to infuse children — future citizens — with values of obedience, compliance, and respect for the state and its laws (Paglayan, 2022, 2024).

This history raises a critical question about the motivations of Southern states following the mass mobilization and enfranchisement of Black Americans: Did state politicians increase educational expenditures in predominantly Black counties in an effort to address Black citizens’ demands (i.e., democratic responsiveness), or did they do so to enhance the social control function of schools (i.e., elite resistance)? Education expenditure levels on their own cannot tell us which of these possible logics — responsiveness or resistance through social control — best explains why Southern states redirected resources toward the education of Black children. Looking at the *content* of the education that Black (and white) children received can provide better clues.

To shed light on this question, I conduct a difference-in-differences analysis comparing the content of state-approved high school history textbooks in Southern versus non-Southern states before and after the Civil Rights Movement. State-approved history textbooks are especially helpful for understanding the political goals of state-level policymakers. How an official textbook discusses slavery, the causes of the Civil War, or the Jim Crow Era, and how it depicts Black people, tells us a lot about the messages that state-level politicians want children to internalize when it comes to the history of racial tensions in the United States. If Southern politicians were indeed responsive to Black constituents’ preferences, we should observe considerable change in official textbooks over time to better align textbook content with

the demands of Black citizens. Yet, as the analysis below shows, this is not what we observe.

The analysis reveals that Southern textbooks did not evolve to address Black people's demand for "integrated textbooks." Two decades after the start of the Civil Rights Movement, new editions continued to severely downplay or outright omit the history of racial discrimination in the United States. This suggests that Cascio and Washington's (2014) finding that Southern state governments increased their investment in Black children's schooling was *not* motivated by an effort to address the demands and grievances of Black citizens. On the contrary, while textbooks outside the South did change in a direction consistent with the demands of civil rights activists, in the South, where politicians felt most threatened by these demands, state governments resisted revising the curriculum.

The results highlight the curriculum as a key policy instrument by which political elites may attempt to reinforce the status quo, especially when historically excluded groups mobilize and gain a formal voice in politics. This aligns with Paglayan's (2024) conceptualization of education systems as instruments of social and political control rather than primarily as a means of improving human capital. Paglayan (2024) argues that, under certain conditions, politicians will respond to mass mobilization against the status quo by investing in schools to teach children that the status quo is fine. This theory is consistent, for example, with the emergence — immediately following the summer 2020 Black Lives Matter protests demanding "anti-racist" institutional reforms — of efforts to prohibit schools from teaching that existing institutions perpetuate racism. While growing research provides empirical support for this theory from non-democracies in Europe, Latin America Paglayan (2022, 2024), Sub-Saharan Africa (Liu, 2024), Turkey (Bozçağa and Cansunar, 2022), and Southeast Asia (Zaw, 2024), this article expands the generalizability of this theory by demonstrating its applicability in a context of democratization.

In addition to enriching our understanding of the Civil Rights Movement's institutional consequences by bringing a comparative politics lens to bear on education reform, the article contributes to scholarship on how political elites respond to protest by racial minorities, offering insights into whether mobilization effectively secures substantive policy change (Gause, 2022; Morel, 2023) or backfires. Wasow (2020) finds that civil rights protests that included protester-initiated violence increased antagonistic responses, paving the way for the media and Southern political elites to emphasize the need for social control policies. While past research stresses "law and order" and "tough on crime" policies (Eubank and Fresh, 2022; Flamm, 2005; Murakawa, 2008; Wasow, 2020), this article emphasizes an additional, often underappreciated, tool of social control — indoctrinating Black children to believe that racial discrimination is minimal.

## Education as Social Control in Democracies: Theory and Implications

This section extends Paglayan's (2024) theory of education as indoctrination and social control to democracies, clarifying its implications for the United States after the Civil Rights Movement. Indoctrination refers to the process of teaching someone to accept a set of beliefs uncritically. When political elites teach children beliefs that justify the prevailing order, indoctrination serves social control purposes.

Paglayan's (2024) theory predicts that elites will intensify indoctrination efforts when they experience *mass contestation of the status quo* — such as protests, riots, or revolutions — that heighten elites' *fear* of a breakdown of social order and lead them to conclude that existing policy tools are *insufficient* to maintain social order. To contain social disorder in the short term, elites may redouble repression and/or provide economic or institutional concessions to appease protesters. As a complementary approach aimed at promoting long-term order, elites may use education to prevent *future* dissent by teaching children not to question the status quo. Indoctrination thus becomes part of a broader strategy of *elite resistance* aimed at preserving power through social control.

However, not all mass mobilizations are likely to trigger indoctrination efforts. Four scope conditions must be met: (1) elites feel *threatened* by protesters' demands, (2) they *believe* indoctrination can prevent future dissent, (3) they have sufficient fiscal and administrative *capacity* to pursue indoctrination, and (4) they expect to remain in power *long enough* to reap the benefits of indoctrinating children and adolescents. If any of these conditions is absent, indoctrination efforts are unlikely.

Is it plausible for these scope conditions to hold in democracies? While democracy does not inherently preclude the first or third conditions, the second and fourth merit scrutiny. First, while it is reasonable to wonder whether democratically elected politicians hold more liberal views about education and reject its use for social control, cross-national research suggests that indoctrination in school is pervasive in both autocracies and democracies; what differs between them is not the intensity of indoctrination so much as the content of that indoctrination (Del Río *et al.*, 2024; Neundorf *et al.*, 2024; Paglayan, 2024). Second, whether regular elections and political turnover lead to time horizons that are too short to encourage investments in indoctrination will likely depend on the level of political competition and the composition of the ruling class. In democracies where politicians come from elite sectors of society, individual politicians and parties may alter but elites *as a group* may expect to remain in power long enough to benefit from indoctrination. In such contexts, mass protests threatening to upend the balance of power between elites and the masses may prompt elites to use education to teach the masses that good citizens respect existing institutions.

The theory predicts that when the four scope conditions are met, mass protest against the status quo will likely prompt threatened elites to enhance the social control function of schools. This could take various forms, such as (a) devoting more resources to teach an already existing curriculum that promotes elites' preferred narrative, (b) reforming the curriculum to better align its content with elites' preferred narrative, or (c) both. By contrast, political elites who do not feel threatened by protesters' demands will not pursue such efforts.

A relevant question is whether the above predictions will differ if the masses, in addition to engaging in protest, also become enfranchised — as occurred in the United States in the 1960s and in other cases where social protest or revolution coincided with democratization and the extension of the franchise. In such contexts, one may wonder whether politicians who want to win elections, instead of investing in social control, will become more responsive to the demands of protesters and newly enfranchised citizens. I argue that whether enfranchisement prompts responsiveness or resistance depends on whether elites perceive enfranchisements as a threat to their hold on power. If enfranchisement fundamentally undermines elites' ability to retain power, they will resist through social control. If elites believe they can continue winning elections — perhaps by building new coalitions — resistance is less likely.

The implication of this theory is that we should expect greater elite resistance to Black citizens' curriculum demands in the Deep South than elsewhere following the Civil Rights Movement. Southern elites felt especially threatened by both the civil rights protests and the mass enfranchisement of Black citizens for three main reasons. First, protests targeted racial segregation and voter suppression policies that were especially pervasive in the South. Second, while protests occurred nationwide, *violent* protests were concentrated in Southern states,<sup>1</sup> prompting white elites and citizens to frame the protests as a threat to social order (Wasow, 2020). Third, owing to the larger Black population and the history of voter suppression in the South, the sudden mass enfranchisement of Black citizens through the VRA created a new electorate in the South that could drastically alter electoral outcomes, bringing more Black politicians into local and state office and ending the one-party dominance of the conservative Democratic Party (Komisarchik, Forthcoming; Mickey, 2015). Outside the South, where political competition was already greater, Black voter suppression less common,<sup>2</sup> and the share of Black residents lower, the VRA was less likely to completely upend the existing political order.

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<sup>1</sup>Although most protests were peaceful, the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968 sparked a wave of violent protests that included vandalism, violent confrontation between protestors and police forces, and multiple deaths and arrests (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/10/12/critics-claim-blm-was-more-violent-than-1960s-civil-rights-protests-thats-just-not-true/>).

<sup>2</sup>This is not to say that voter suppression was inexistent outside the South.

## The Civil Rights Movement's Educational Demands

Civil rights activists during the 1950s and 1960s fought for deep transformations in education institutions. While desegregation was their most visible demand, Black activists, parents, and educators also advocated for curriculum reform — an issue well known to politicians and publishers at the time, even if less recognized today (Zimmerman, 2004). Past research shows that important legal victories on desegregation triggered fierce resistance by Southern white elites. This suggests the possibility that elites may have also resisted curriculum reform demands. This section summarizes, first, the experience with desegregation and, second, the Civil Rights Movement's curriculum demands.

### *School Desegregation: Legal Victory Followed by Political Resistance*

Although the Civil Rights Movement accomplished major legal victories at the federal level, including the Supreme Court's 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* and the passage of the Civil Rights Act (CRA) of 1964 and the VRA of 1965, in the states, where education policy is made, desegregation encountered considerable resistance, especially in the Deep South. Even though the 1954 *Brown* ruling specified that state-mandated racial segregation in public schools and the doctrine of "separate but equal" were unconstitutional, a decade after *Brown*, racial segregation in public schools of the South remained intact (Cascio *et al.*, 2008). "Across the Deep South," writes Mickey (2015, p. 174), "the *Brown* ruling . . . led both to a surge in white supremacist civic and political mobilization and to concomitant setbacks for black protest." State and local politicians in Deep South states, Mickey argues, "pursued strategies of 'massive resistance,' by which they sought to decry, deter, and then defer the racial desegregation of their schools."

Meaningful desegregation in the South only began in the mid-1960s, driven by federal financial incentives and additional court rulings. About half of Southern school districts integrated voluntarily, motivated by the financial incentives of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which increased federal funding for districts that served low-income students and complied with the 1964 CRA, which prohibited segregated entities from receiving federal funding. The rest, mainly wealthier and larger districts, desegregated only when a lower circuit federal court ordered them to do so (Cascio *et al.*, 2008).

Implementation of court-ordered desegregation plans encountered significant obstacles, including large-scale protests by white students and parents<sup>3</sup> and intervention by local politicians and governors. Among other tactics,

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<sup>3</sup>"Whites in Mobile Fight School Plan of Full Integration," *New York Times* (1968).

Southern governors sent state troops to repress Black activists and remove Black students from school premises, claiming it was for their own safety (Mickey, 2015). In addition, court orders often led white families to move to other districts (Reber, 2005).

Still, Cascio *et al.* (2008) document that by 1972 school desegregation in Southern states had been completed — at least in terms of the composition of student enrollment — thanks to the federal financial incentives in place since 1965 and the NAACP’s persistent legal action. As Black students began to attend the same schools as white students, some districts embarked on various efforts to limit civil rights activists’ influence over education. Examples included grouping children by “ability” and removing Black educators from integrated schools. Studies conducted by the National Education Association, the Race Relations Information Center, and other organizations found that Black teachers and civil rights activists across the South were fired, demoted, or pressured to resign in the wake of desegregation.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, there is evidence that desegregation improved Black students’ high school graduation rates, a common proxy for education quality (Reber, 2010). However, like education expenditures, the racial composition of teachers and high school graduation rates alone tell us little about the *motivations* of Southern policymakers. Were Black teachers fired as part of deliberate efforts to prevent Black constituents’ ideas from entering the classroom, or were they fired, as some argued, because they lacked adequate teaching skills? Did Black students’ graduation rates improve because of, or despite, the intentions of Southern education policymakers?

Looking at the content of state textbooks can provide valuable information about the extent to which policymakers responded to the Civil Rights Movement by investing in education in an effort to be responsive to Black citizens’ education demands, or whether they invested in education as a tool to teach Black children that the status quo was not as bad as some might think.

### *Curriculum Demands during the Civil Rights Movement*

Members of the Black community argued that providing an adequate education for Black children required not only desegregation but also curriculum reform. Since at least the 1940s, Black activists shared “an overriding concern with textbooks,” which they viewed as “a chief cause” of racial prejudice and white supremacy beliefs (Zimmerman, 2004, p. 52). The primary target of these demands were history textbooks, which often depicted slaves as “happy” or praised the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) for keeping “foolish Negroes” out of government (Zimmerman, 2004, p. 46).

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<sup>4</sup>“16 Black Alabama Teachers Reinstated and Given Back Pay,” *Atlanta Daily World* (1972).

Faced with schools that, in their view, reinforced submission, Black activists created their own educational alternatives. In the 1950s, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), presided by Martin Luther King Jr., established Citizenship Schools to prepare Black adults for voter-registration literacy tests and engage them in reflection about their history, civic rights, and power to effect change. In 1964, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) launched Freedom Schools as part of Freedom Summer in Mississippi, with the explicit goal of helping Black people “rethink in their own terms the ways and means of shaping and controlling their destiny” (Cobb, 2004, p. 136). Forty-one Freedom Schools enrolled more than 2,000 young Black students — twice the projected enrollment — and combined remedial math and reading with lessons on Black history and leadership skills (Emery *et al.*, 2004). Above all, the Freedom Schools curriculum encouraged students to “begin to question.”<sup>5</sup> The rationale for this approach is powerfully articulated by Cobb, SNCC field coordinator and Freedom Schools director:

Repression is the law; oppression, a way of life . . . Veering from the path of “our way of life” [is] not tolerated at all. Here, an idea of your own is a subversion that must be quelched; for each bit of intellectual initiative represents the threat of a probe into the why of denial. Learning here means only learning to stay in your place. Your place is to be satisfied — a “good nigger.”<sup>6</sup>

The search for alternative curricula extended beyond community-based schools. In 1965, concerns raised by Freedom School teachers about the racist portrayal of Black people in the textbooks used in public schools ignited the creation of the Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC). Founded in New York by a group of editors, writers, and librarians, the CIBC argued that history textbooks should acknowledge the brutality and legacy of slavery, the structural nature of racism, and the contributions of Black people. It compiled lists of “culturally accurate and respectful books,” published reviews of children’s book, and organized annual contests to help writers from marginalized groups secure book contracts.<sup>7</sup>

As demands for textbook reform gained momentum in the 1950s and 1960s, Black parents, activists, educators, and numerous civil rights organizations including the NAACP, the Urban League, the Congress of Racial Equality, and the Black Panthers pushed states and school districts to adopt “integrated textbooks” that more accurately portrayed Black lives and achievements. “The

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<sup>5</sup>Stembridge quoted in Council Federated Organizations (1964), *Notes on Teaching in Mississippi*, p. 1. Emphasis mine.

<sup>6</sup>Cobb quoted in Council Federated Organizations (1964), *Notes on Teaching in Mississippi*, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup>Chambers (1983), interview.

same forces which are leading a social revolution for civil rights across the land," reports the *Boston Globe* in 1963, "are demanding that school books contain more about Negroes."<sup>8</sup> Activists contacted state and local politicians,<sup>9</sup> education officials,<sup>10</sup> textbook adoption commissions,<sup>11</sup> and publishers<sup>12</sup> to denounce the "appalling omission" of Black people in textbooks,<sup>13</sup> the reinforcement of racist stereotypes describing Black people as inferior, and the glorification of slavery and the KKK.<sup>14</sup> They created lists of books that "accurately depict Negro life and achievements"<sup>15</sup> and warned that failure to replace racist textbooks "might lead to an uprising in the future on the part of militant students and parents."<sup>16</sup>

An analysis of politicians' discourse conducted by Zimmerman (2004) and my own non-exhaustive review of newspaper articles on textbook debates from the 1950s to the 1970s both suggest that political responses to demands for integrated textbooks varied considerably between the South and the non-South. Southern politicians and education officials claimed that existing textbooks were fine, while those outside the South expressed sympathy for substantial revisions. In Georgia, education officials argued that even minor word changes constituted "dangers" and said there was "no place in Georgia schools any time for anything that disagrees with our way of life" (Zimmerman, 2004, p. 58). Conservatives argued that Black people were biologically inferior (Zimmerman, 2004, 57-58) and that textbook revisions would not only harm white children's psychology but also promote "Socialist," "Communist,"<sup>17</sup> and anti-patriotic values. In Alabama, when white elites discovered that a McGraw-Hill civics textbook had a chapter entitled "Minority Groups Should Share Equally With All Others in the American Way of Life," Governor Gordon Persons forced the publisher to delete the chapter, calling it "not in keeping with Southern

<sup>8</sup>"Negro to Be More Prominent in School Textbooks," *Boston Globe* (1963).

<sup>9</sup>"Alabama Governor Censors Textbook," *Philadelphia Tribune* (1952); "Texas Textbook Tug of War: Wide Influence 'One Worldism' Hit," *The Christian Science Monitor* (1962).

<sup>10</sup>"Alabama NAACP Accuses State Of Racism In Books," *Atlanta Daily World* (1970); "Parents Say Textbook Favors Slavery, Klan," *Los Angeles Times* (1970).

<sup>11</sup>"Alabama Advised To Discard Lily-White Textbooks — Negro Life and History Ignored," *New Journal and Guide* (1970).

<sup>12</sup>"Negro to Be More Prominent in School Textbooks," *Boston Globe* (1963).

<sup>13</sup>"Cites Text Book Deficiencies In Treating History Of America," *Atlanta Daily World* (1954).

<sup>14</sup>"Alabama NAACP Accuses State Of Racism In Books," *Atlanta Daily World* (1970); "Parents Say Textbook Favors Slavery, Klan," *Los Angeles Times* (1970).

<sup>15</sup>"Alabama Advised To Discard Lily-White Textbooks — Negro Life and History Ignored," *New Journal and Guide* (1970).

<sup>16</sup>"Alabama Advised To Discard Lily-White Textbooks — Negro Life and History Ignored," *New Journal and Guide* (1970).

<sup>17</sup>"Texas Textbook Tug of War: Wide Influence 'One Worldism' Hit," *The Christian Science Monitor* (1962); "Social Science Studying Faculties," *The Atlanta Constitution* (1970).

traditions”<sup>18</sup> and “anti-American propaganda.”<sup>19</sup> The controversy prompted the State Board of Education to demand publishers remove “subversive matters” from textbooks and led to a 1953 legislative act requiring publishers to certify that neither the author nor any authors cited had Communist affiliations.<sup>20</sup> After 15 years of insistence from Black parents and educators, in 1971 Alabama revised *Know Alabama*, a mandatory elementary school textbook containing pro-slavery and pro-KKK passages. The new edition, prepared by a company led by two former aides of Governor George Wallace,<sup>21</sup> was deemed “acceptable”<sup>22</sup> by education officials, but Black parents and educators criticized it as only making “subtle” and “misleading” changes. In Texas, the head of the Education Agency’s Textbook Division said in 1968 that “minority groups are pretty well taken care of . . . pretty well represented” in textbooks, even though a Michigan study had recently found that two history textbooks used in Texas high schools (*History of a Free People*, by MacMillan Co., and *The Rise of the American Nation*, by Harcourt Brace) were “very seriously deficient in their treatment of minorities in general and Negroes in particular.”<sup>23</sup>

By contrast, outside the South, while education officials in the 1940s and 1950s had resisted textbook reform, by the mid-1960s they embraced this agenda (Zimmerman, 2004). Major publishers also agreed that “more about Negroes will be included in texts and illustrations.” Nonetheless, one publisher told the *Boston Globe* in 1963 that while they hoped their new line of books “would cause no fuss in big cities,” they were “not surprised” that the new books were “not popular in certain sections of the south.”<sup>24</sup>

Given Southern states’ efforts to block school desegregation well into the 1960s, their initial resistance to reforming history textbooks is perhaps unsurprising. However, by 1972 desegregation in the South had mostly been completed (Cascio *et al.*, 2008). The question remains whether textbooks around this time also changed, as Southern education officials claimed they did, or whether they largely remained the same, as Black citizens argued. While numerous studies have analyzed the content of US history textbooks published in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s (Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC), 1977; Czemiak, 2006; Epstein, 1994; Garcia and Goebel, 1985; Glazer and Ueda, 1983; Jimenez and Lerch, 2019; Krug, 1970; Marcus, 1961; Moreau, 2003; Sloan, 1966; Stamp, 1964; Turner and Dewar, 1973), past studies do not analyze how textbook content changed within specific states over time,

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<sup>18</sup>“Alabama Bans ‘Human Rights’ From Textbook,” *The Chicago Defender* (1952).

<sup>19</sup>“Textbooks Create Alabama Problem: Publishers Cite Difficulty in Obtaining List of Suspected Persons to Meet New Law,” *New York Times* (1954).

<sup>20</sup>“Textbooks Create Alabama Problem: Publishers Cite Difficulty in Obtaining List of Suspected Persons to Meet New Law,” *New York Times* (1954).

<sup>21</sup>“Parents Say Textbook Favors Slavery, Klan,” *Los Angeles Times* (1970).

<sup>22</sup>“Negro History Altered in Alabama Textbook,” *Los Angeles Times* (1971).

<sup>23</sup>“Texas Textbook Fight Seen,” *The Austin Statesman* (1968).

<sup>24</sup>“Negro to Be More Prominent in School Textbooks,” *Boston Globe* (1963).

nor do they compare temporal changes in textbook content in Southern versus non-Southern states.

## School Textbooks in Three States

### *Research Design and Case Selection*

Did Southern state governments in the late 1960s and 1970s increase education expenditures in predominantly Black communities because they became more *responsive* to the educational demands of newly enfranchised Black citizens, as argued by Cascio and Washington (2014), or did they invest in education to enhance its *social control* function, using schools to instill acceptance of the status quo among Black children, as suggested by Paglayan (2022, 2024)? To gain further insight into politicians' motivations, this section examines whether the content of textbooks in the Deep South changed in a direction consistent with the demands of Black activists, educators, and parents following the civil rights protests of the 1950s and 1960s and the enfranchisement of Black Americans in 1965.

Specifically, I use a difference-in-differences approach to compare how the content of state-approved high school history textbooks changed between roughly 1955 and 1975 in Southern versus non-Southern states.<sup>25</sup> Drawing on the theory and expectations outlined earlier, I hypothesize that the prevalence of racist content in textbooks declined less over time in Deep South states than in non-Southern states, as it is in the Deep South where politicians felt most threatened by the demands of civil rights protesters and by newly enfranchised Black citizens. To test this hypothesis, I analyze textbooks from one Southern state (Alabama) and two non-Southern states (California and Indiana). For these three states, I obtained copies of the main history textbooks used in public high schools around 1955 and 1975.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>The identifying assumption is that, in the absence of the Civil Rights Movement, textbook content in the South and non-South would have evolved similarly. While textbook availability prevents me from examining whether Southern and non-Southern textbooks evolved similarly prior to the Civil Rights Movement, Zimmerman's (2004) finding that non-Southern politicians and education officials in the 1940s and 1950s resisted textbook reform provides strong evidence against the hypothesis that non-Southern states may have been more receptive to Blacks' textbook reform demands even prior to the Civil Rights Movement.

<sup>26</sup>For Alabama, I analyze the first edition of Charles Summersell's *Alabama History for Schools*, published in 1957 by Colonial Press, and the fifth revision, published in 1975 by Viewpoint Publications. For Indiana, I analyze Howard Wilder, Robert Ludlum, and Harriett McCune Brown's *This Is America's Story*, published in 1954 and 1975 by Houghton Mifflin. For California, I analyze Gertrude Hartman's *America, Land of Freedom* (California State Series), published in 1956 by D.C. Heath and Company, and June Chapin's *Quest for Liberty* (California State Series), published in 1973 by Addison-Wesley. For ease of exposition, in the main text I sometimes refer to the 1950s textbooks as "1955" textbooks and to the 1970s textbooks as "1975" textbooks.

The three states meet two key selection criteria:

- (1) *A state-level textbook adoption agency exists.* In both 1955 and 1975, these states had a statewide textbook adoption agency — appointed by the governor in Alabama or by the State Board of Education in California and Indiana. These agencies were responsible by law for commissioning, reviewing, and selecting the textbooks that could be used in public schools, and for negotiating with publishers the content and price of textbooks. Their existence enabled state-level politicians to influence education content. I focus on states that had such an agency — as opposed to states where districts or schools had full autonomy to choose textbooks — because my goal is to understand what explains Cascio and Washington’s (2014) finding that Southern *state* governments responded to Blacks’ enfranchisement by increasing *state* education expenditures in predominantly Black communities. Understanding how the content of textbooks adopted by the Alabama Textbook Adoption Commission changed over time relative to textbooks approved for use in non-Southern states can help us gain insight into why the state of Alabama directed more education funds to predominantly Black communities.
- (2) *State-approved textbooks are available.* Among states that met the above criterion, the next step was to select those where (i) the list of textbooks approved by the state-level agency could be found and (ii) copies of the textbooks used around both 1955 and 1975 could be located and obtained. Few states with state-level textbook adoption agencies met these additional conditions. In particular, while other Deep South states also had state-level textbook adoption agencies during the period of analysis, the names and copies of the textbooks approved by the state in both the 1950s and 1970s could only be located for Alabama.

Focusing on Alabama is useful because it was the center of key struggles during the Civil Rights Movement, including the pivotal Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955. Alabama textbooks therefore provide insight into how Southern politicians responded to activist demands in a state where these demands threatened to upend the status quo and elites’ hold on power. Additionally, Alabama mirrors Cascio and Washington’s (2014) finding that education expenditures increased more in counties with large Black populations than in counties with fewer Blacks residents.<sup>27</sup>

To determine whether any observed changes in Alabama textbooks reflect a broader national trend or a Southern-specific response, I compare Alabama with Indiana and California. Indiana, a state with a predominantly white population, provides a baseline to assess whether Alabama’s textbook changes

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<sup>27</sup>See Figure A1 of the Online Appendix.

were part of a nationwide shift in response to the Civil Rights Movement. The comparison with California, a state with a large Hispanic but small Black population, helps determine whether changes in Alabama textbooks reflect a common response to non-white constituents rather than a response specific to newly mobilized and enfranchised Black constituents.

### *Methods Used to Analyze Textbooks*

The main analysis of textbooks involves a sentence-by-sentence content analysis using a common coding scheme applied (blindly) by independent coders to determine the presence of racist content in a given sentence. I also test whether the conclusions hold when analyzing the textbooks using two alternative large language models.

#### *Sentence-by-Sentence Content Analysis*

The main analysis followed four steps. First, with support from a team of research assistants, I marked in each textbook every sentence that explicitly or implicitly referred to Black people's lives or history. For example, there are 1,309 sentences that explicitly or implicitly refer to Black individuals in the first edition of *Alabama History for Schools*, published in 1957; 855 sentences in the 1954 edition of Indiana's *This is America's Story*; and 1,022 sentences in California's *America, Land of Freedom*, published in 1956. By the mid-1970s, the number of sentences referring to Black individuals and Black history remains similar in Alabama (1,311), lower in Indiana (676), and considerably higher in California (2,002).

Second, building on the work of numerous social scientists who have studied how minorities are depicted in school textbooks (Banks, 1969; Carpenter, 1941; Coats and Wade, 2004; CIBC, 1977; Czemiak, 2006; Epstein, 1994; Garcia and Goebel, 1985; Glazer and Ueda, 1983; Jimenez, 2020; Jimenez and Lerch, 2019; Krug, 1970; Marcus, 1961; Moreau, 2003; Sloan, 1966; Smitherman and van Dijk, 1988; Stamp, 1964; Turner and Dewar, 1973), I developed a coding scheme to classify whether a given sentence contains racist content. The term "racist" is contested. In this study, I use it simply as a shortcut to refer to content *considered racist* by Black parents, activists, educators, and others who demanded textbook integration and reform. This is because the question I examine is whether politicians were responsive or resistant to these demands — regardless of whether we agree with the demands themselves. Specifically, the coding scheme asks eight questions about each sentence that explicitly or implicitly refers to Black people's lives or history. Some examples of these questions include:<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>The complete methodology and the manual used to train coders can be found in the Online Appendix.

1. Does the sentence generalize positive experiences in US political, social, or economic life (e.g., freedom, democracy, access to education, etc.) as if these applied equally to everyone, without distinguishing between the experiences of Black and white Americans?
2. Does the sentence minimize the hardships endured by Black Americans, or does it exaggerate their positive experiences? For example, does the sentence minimize the cruelty of slavery, or does it equate the experiences of Black enslaved individuals with those of poor white individuals?
3. Does the sentence implicitly or explicitly reinforce stereotypes of Black people as inferior human beings, characterizing them as “violent,” “lazy,” “inferior,” etc., or de-humanizing them by referring to them as commodities?
4. Does the sentence discuss racism as an issue stemming from specific prejudiced individuals, or does it discuss racial inequalities as something that resulted from existing policies, laws, and institutions? For example, does it acknowledge the slave codes, the Jim Crow laws, the policies that enabled racial segregation in public service provision, etc.?

Third, I trained a group of coders to apply this coding scheme. Coders worked independently and I redacted the textbooks extensively to prevent them from seeing any information that might enable them to identify the state or year of the textbook they were analyzing. Because several questions in the coding scheme require a subjective assessment, it comes as no surprise that some coders were systematically more likely to identify racist content in sentences than others. However, regardless of the baseline level of racist content that each coder identified in the 1950s textbooks, there was remarkable consistency across coders in how much *change* in racist content they detected between the 1950s and the 1970s.

Fourth, I aggregate the responses into two dependent variables: (1) a binary measure indicating whether a given sentence contains *any* racist content and (2) a continuous measure of how much racist content a sentence contains based on the answers to all the questions in the coding scheme.

#### *Textbook Analysis Using Two Large Language Models*

In addition to this sentence-by-sentence content analysis, I assess the robustness of the conclusions using two large language models for text analysis.

First, I use NotebookLM to assess whether a textbook satisfies 21 ideal benchmarks that, according to the Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC) (1977), should be met by all history textbooks to ensure a fair account of the history of racial discrimination. Examples of these benchmarks

include acknowledging that “Slavery was inherently cruel and inhuman;” “The Reconstruction governments were more progressive and democratic than later southern governments;” “Institutional racism, not merely individual prejudice, causes and perpetuates racial inequality;” and “The myth of ‘progress’ obscures the existing reality of the majority of Black people.” I ask NotebookLM to determine whether a textbook provides “Incorrect Information,” “No Information,” “Omits This Period,” “Limited Information,” or “Full Information” about each of the CIBC’s 21 benchmarks.

Second, I apply Lucy *et al.*’s (2020) Natural Language Processing (NPL) analysis of recent Texas history textbooks to the 1950s and 1970s textbooks of Alabama, California, and Indiana. The analysis classifies what the verbs and adjectives used to describe Black people convey about their power (strong vs. weak), valence (positive vs. negative), and agency (active vs. passive). For example, in the phrase “X affects Y and Y applauds X,” X has power while Y does not; in the phrase “X suffered,” the verb suffered implies positive sentiment (sympathy) toward X; and in the phrase “X obeys,” X has low agency.

While the results using these alternative methodologies are consistent with the main analysis, they do not provide the kind of nuanced understanding that the in-depth sentence-by-sentence analysis provides.

### **Persistent Racist Content in Southern Textbooks after the Civil Rights Movement**

The sentence-by-sentence analysis of textbooks reveals that while history textbooks in Indiana and California became considerably less racist after the Civil Rights Movement, textbooks in Alabama remained as racist in 1975 as they were in the 1950s. These results are summarized in Figure 1. The first key finding shown in that figure is that, at the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, the level of racist content was high and remarkably similar across all three states: around 60% of the sentences in history textbooks that referred to Black individuals contained racist content that was antithetical to the demands of civil rights activists. Among other things, the 1950s textbooks of Alabama, California and Indiana discussed the political and economic rights of the Early Republic as if they applied equally to everyone, described the life of a slave in rosy terms, and downplayed the hostility and discrimination faced by Black Americans during the Jim Crow Era. By the mid-1970s, however, the percentage of sentences containing racist content had declined by 26 percentage points in Indiana and by 27 percentage points in California. In Alabama, by contrast, there was no such decline. Textbooks remained as unlikely in 1975 as in 1955 to acknowledge

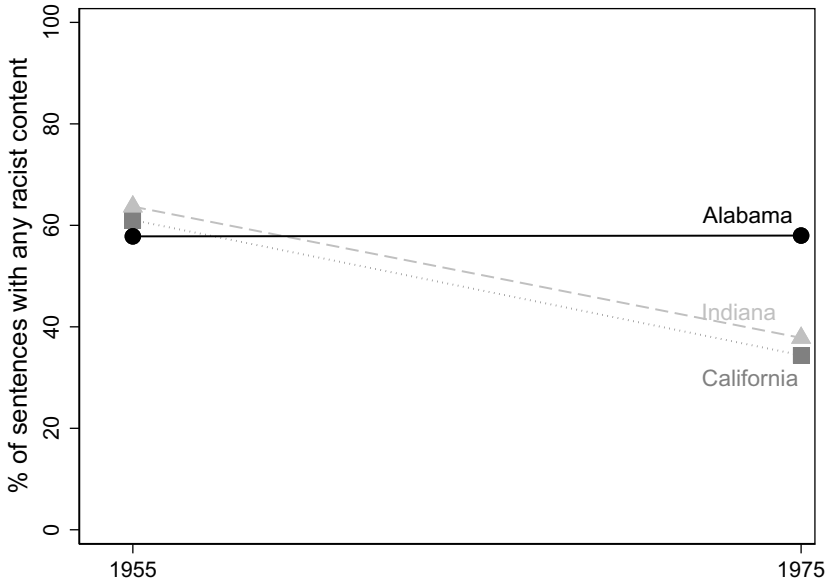


Figure 1: Percentage of sentences with any racist content in the history textbooks of Alabama, California, and Indiana before and after the Civil Rights Movement.

the history of racial inequality and discrimination within the state and around the country.<sup>29</sup>

The absence of meaningful change in the prevalence of racist content in Alabama textbooks does not reflect the absence of *revisions* to the text. The 1975 is the fifth revision of the 1950s textbook. Of the 1,311 sentences in the 1975 edition that explicitly or implicitly refer to Black individuals, Black lives, or Black history, 32% are sentences not found in the 1950s edition, including entirely new sentences or edits of previous sentences.

A good illustration of how little change there was in the degree of racist content in Alabama textbooks comes from the chapters devoted to describing life under slavery in the 1957 and 1975 editions. Both the pre- and post-Civil Rights Movement textbooks depict slaves as cheerful individuals with no deprivations. When telling readers about the food that slaves ate, both textbooks suggest that slaves suffered no want or need. They describe plantation owners as caring individuals who liked to provide a balanced diet to slaves, highlight the “extra delicacies” that slaves ate during hog killing time without acknowledging that these were in fact the leftovers, talk about the watermelons that

<sup>29</sup>Figure B1.3 of the Online Appendix breaks down the analysis by coding scheme question.

slaves ate during “the good old summertime,” tell readers that many slaves “loved to fish” and “had their own gardens,” “raised their own chickens” and sold them to buy “luxuries,” and talk about the “special feast” that plantation owners provided to slaves during Christmas and other holidays. When talking about where slaves lived, both the 1957 and 1975 textbooks tell readers that “like the white people in the slavery country, the blacks liked to live near each other to keep from getting lonesome.” Both textbooks also tell readers that “white playmates” taught young slaves to read (without acknowledging that slaves were prohibited from attending school) and suggest that there were opportunities for upward mobility for slaves by becoming domestic servants or drivers. One especially bold paragraph in the 1957 textbook which argued that “slavery was the earliest form of social security in the United States” because “the slave received the best medical care that the times could offer” was removed from the 1975 textbook. However, even in 1975, Alabama’s history textbook continues to minimize the hardships and cruelty endured by slaves, writing that, when it came to health care, the slave was “better off than free laborers, white or black.” Finally, while both the 1957 and 1975 textbooks mention the slave codes, they explain that slaves were prohibited from selling property without the plantation owner’s permission in order “to limit stealing;” they minimize the role of the slave codes by stressing that many provisions were not enforced; and they tell readers that “the execution of a slave was considered to be more of a punishment for the master than for the slave.”

The evolution of depictions of slavery in the history textbooks of Indiana and California is considerably different. In Indiana, the 1954 textbook provides a rosy picture of how slaves lived. As the following excerpt shows, the textbook minimizes the grievances endured by slaves, and while it acknowledges that some were treated cruelly, it teaches children that in general slaves were treated well:

Life in the slave quarters on many a plantation was not too unhappy. During the day the small children played merrily, often with the younger white children from the “great house.” In the twilight young and old gathered to sing and dance. . . Of course there were some harsh masters who treated their slaves cruelly. In general, however, slaves were too valuable to be mistreated.

By contrast, Indiana’s 1975 textbook does not describe the slaves as cheerful or happy, and while it acknowledges that some of them were treated better by plantation owners, it highlights that in general life as a slave was very difficult and subject to cruel treatment:

The slaves lived a hard and cheerless life. They were owned by their master and were completely under his control. Life in the slave

quarters was not always unhappy. The small children sometimes played with the younger white children from the “great house”... Yet despite instances of individual kindness on the part of some masters, life in bondage was very difficult. Harsh masters or their overseers treated slaves cruelly, whipping them if they misbehaved or ran away.

In California, one of the most striking features of the 1956 textbook is how infrequently it mentions Black slaves. Among the few mentions, the textbook describes enslaved Black populations as “unskilled labor,” depicts slavery as “necessary,” and does not mention the slave codes or the violence or harsh living conditions endured by enslaved people. The 1973 textbook is a considerable departure. It notes that the “living conditions of most plantation slaves were primitive” and “overseers were often accused of being careless and brutal toward slaves”; provides examples of “slave codes, sets of laws affecting slaves” that prohibited enslaved people from learning to read or write, owning weapons, or striking a white man in self-defense; and describes that, to enforce the slave codes, “slave patrols with vicious bloodhounds checked for code violations,” with punishments including “whipping, branding, imprisonment, and death.” The same textbook argues that “slavery had long-lasting and harmful effects,” including the perpetuation of the white supremacist belief that “slavery was good for Negroes because they were biologically inferior.” Moreover, the 1973 textbook devotes seven pages to excerpts from primary sources providing first-hand accounts of life as a slave.

The differential evolution of Alabama textbooks compared to Indiana and California textbooks extends well beyond the discussion of slavery. This is reflected in Figure 2, which shows how the percentage of sentences containing racist content evolved over time in each state, distinguishing between sentences

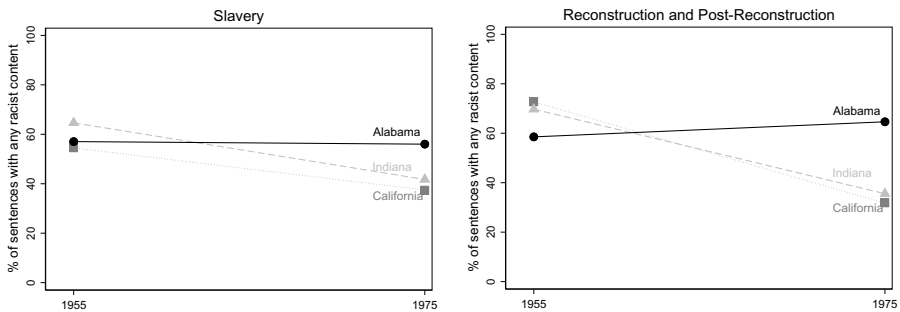


Figure 2: Percentage of sentences about slavery, Reconstruction, or Post-Reconstruction, that contain any racist content in the history textbooks of Alabama, California, and Indiana before and after the Civil Rights Movement.

related to slavery and sentences related to the Reconstruction and Post-Reconstruction periods. The figure shows that while sentences on slavery remained equally racist in Alabama over time, those referring to Reconstruction and Post-Reconstruction periods became slightly more racist. This is in contrast to trends in Indiana and California, where the discussion of the Early Republic, Reconstruction, and Post-Reconstruction in the 1970s textbooks tends to better acknowledge that the political and economic rights of white and Black individuals differed. In Alabama, the history textbooks from both the 1950s and 1970s talk about the political and economic rights that “all Americans” enjoyed during the Early Republic, and the 1970s textbook more so than the 1950s textbook exaggerates the improvements in Black individuals’ lives during Reconstruction and minimizes or legitimizes many of the discriminatory policies of the Jim Crow era.

Another example of Alabama’s failure to address civil rights textbook demands is its treatment of the KKK. The 1957 edition of *Alabama History for Schools* devoted a one-page section to the KKK, describing its members as “masked night ridders who flogged people and otherwise took justice into their own hands” as part of “the White Man’s Movement . . . to drive the Radicals out of office and the carpetbaggers out of Alabama.” The section omits that the KKK targeted and killed Black people; the only mention of Black people is a sentence that says that “many Negroes supported” the one-party system of Conservative Democrats, which allegedly replaced the KKK as “a better method of combatting Radicals.” In the 1975 edition, the entire section on the KKK was removed. In other words, like the 1957 textbook, the 1975 edition remains silent about the KKK’s violence against Black individuals.

In Indiana and California, the 1950s textbooks similarly depict the KKK as a natural response to the “burden of bad government” (Indiana) and “corrupt governments” (California) of the reconstruction period. Unlike Alabama’s 1950s textbook, these editions do acknowledge that the KKK targeted Black people, but they do not mention that the KKK killed them. By the 1970s, Indiana’s textbook explicitly says that when KKK “warnings” were insufficient, “Klan members returned to beat and kill Black people.” In California, the 1970s textbook presents excerpts from a KKK founder who claims the group imposed “habits of good behavior” on “lawless” Black people; Black witnesses describing how the KKK killed Black men and youth; and a petition to Congress stating that the KKK was “robbing whipping ravishing and killing our people without provocation.”

While Figures 1 and 2 are based on a binary measure capturing whether a given sentence contains *any* racist content, Figures B1.1 and B1.2 of the Online Appendix show that, if we instead use a continuous measure of the average *amount* of racist content per sentence, we also observe that the prevalence of racist content remained unchanged in Alabama textbooks but declined over time in Indiana and California.

**Robustness**

These results are robust to other textbook analysis methods. First, the NPL analysis following Lucy *et al.* (2018) suggests the verbs and adjectives used to describe Black individuals deteriorated more over time in Alabama than in Indiana and California textbooks.<sup>30</sup> Second, an analysis by NotebookLM of how each textbook performs against 21 benchmarks proposed by the CIBC provides further support for the main conclusion. Figure 3, which displays the number of benchmarks met partially or fully, shows that while the alignment between textbook content and the CIBC’s benchmarks was similarly low across all states in the 1950s, textbooks’ alignment with the CIBC benchmarks improved slightly over time in Indiana and considerably in California, but deteriorated in Alabama.<sup>31</sup>

**Interpretation**

Alabama’s textbook choices must be understood in the context of its broader response to the Civil Rights Movement. The persistence of racist content in

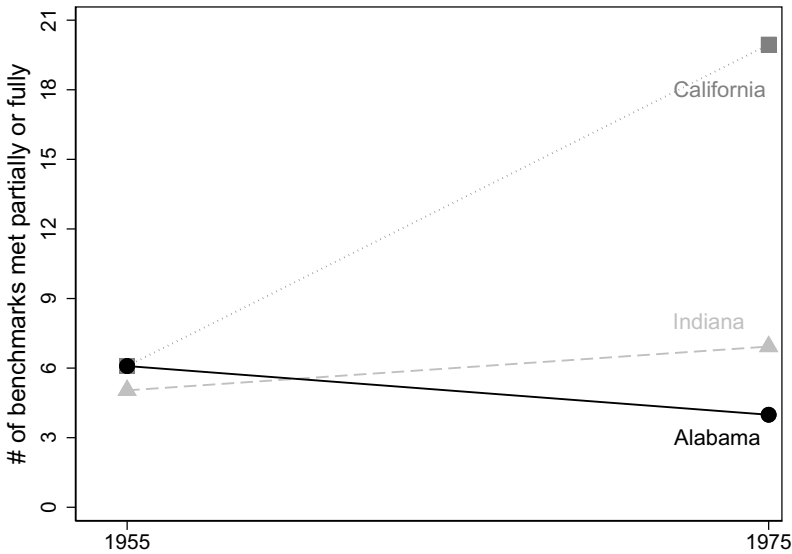


Figure 3: Number of benchmarks (from a list of 21 proposed by the CIBC) met partially or fully by the history textbooks of Alabama, California, and Indiana before and after the Civil Rights Movement.

<sup>30</sup>See Online Appendix D.

<sup>31</sup>See Online Appendix C for the list of benchmarks, prompt for NotebookLM, and NotebookLM output.

history textbooks reflects a general pattern of resistance by state politicians to the Civil Rights Movement's demands for institutional reform. In the case of education institutions, this resistance was perhaps most evident in the roll-out of desegregation plans. As in other Southern states (Mickey, 2015), Alabama's governors actively opposed and resisted court-ordered desegregation. Governor John Patterson (1959–1963) boasted that if there was “no integration in the schools,” this was “not because of luck or chance, but due to constant work, diligence and attention” to “keep the NAACP out of Alabama.”<sup>32</sup> Governor George Wallace (1963–1967) sent state troops to local school districts to block desegregation, citing “the express intention of the governor to preserve the peace. . . and protect the lives and property of all citizens,”<sup>33</sup> and threatened to hold mass meetings to shame district superintendents who signed desegregation compliance forms. The State Superintendent of Education, Austin E. Meadows, sent telegrams to school districts warning that state funds would be cut if they did not disclose their desegregation plans to state officials, and the governor-controlled state school building authority offered to construct extra classrooms for white students to avoid attending racially integrated classrooms.<sup>34</sup> Governor Albert Brewer (1968–1971) signed legislation urging white parents to defy compliance with federal court decisions on desegregation.<sup>35</sup> When Wallace returned to office, he continued to obstruct integration, claiming that court-ordered desegregation had “sounded the death knell to education on a quality level in this country” and insisting that if the majority of voters in a county “are proud of their school and want it preserved as it was,” they should be allowed to do so.<sup>36</sup>

The multiple tactics employed by Alabama officials to uphold segregation demonstrate that state politicians made a deliberate effort to resist civil rights reforms rather than accommodate Black activists' demands. As desegregation in student enrollment increased despite the state's attempts to block it, either because districts responded to federal financial incentives or to federal court orders, new resistance tactics emerged. For example, when students were integrated under federal court orders between 1966 and 1970, the number of Black principals dropped from 620 to 362 (from 35% to 25% of all principals).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Message of Governor John Patterson to Joint Session of the Alabama Legislature at Organizational Session, 1963.

<sup>33</sup>“Alabama Police Block First School Integration: Wallace Cites Fear of Violence Alabama Schools,” *Los Angeles Times* (1963).

<sup>34</sup>“Alabama Defiance Told on School Segregation; Superintendent Informs Jurists How He and Gov. Wallace Put Pressure,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 1, 1966.

<sup>35</sup>“Alabama Legislature Endorses Wallace Plan: Adopts Proposals Urging Parents to Defy Federal Courts on School Integration,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 5, 1969.

<sup>36</sup>“Wallace Blocks School Integration in 2 Cities,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 1971.

<sup>37</sup>“Alabama Schools Scored on Blacks: Study Finds Policy to Drop Negroes as Educators,” *New York Times* (1971).

Inside schools, “ability” grouping was used to separate white and Black children into different classrooms.<sup>38</sup>

The state’s textbook policies should be understood within this broader strategy of elite resistance to institutional reform. As discussed earlier, state politicians and education officials in Alabama framed textbook reform demands as “anti-American.” The analysis of textbooks suggests that this framing was not just an act of performative politics to pay lip service to their white constituents. Well into the 1970s, Alabama’s governor-appointed textbook adoption commission resisted incorporating changes that would have better aligned history textbooks with the demands of civil rights activists. In the case of content on Reconstruction and Post-Reconstruction, and in textbooks’ alignment with the CIBC’s benchmarks, the analysis suggests that textbooks in fact became *more* racist over time.

When put together with the state’s decision to increase school expenditures in communities with a large share of Black residents during the same time period, the persistent use of mandatory textbooks that promoted white elites’ preferred narrative is more consistent with a theory of education as social control than with a theory of education reform in response to the demands of newly enfranchised Black voters. Put simply, the state of Alabama did not invest in the kind of education that Black constituents wanted; it increased funding for a schooling experience that reinforced the status quo — teaching children that racial grievances were overstated rather than acknowledging them.

## Conclusion

The education policy responses observed in the United States after the Civil Rights Movement are similar to the responses to mass protest of nineteenth-century autocracies in Europe and Latin America: in places where the mobilization and enfranchisement of Black Americans posed a larger threat to the status quo, politicians responded by investing in mass schooling to teach (Black) children that there was little reason to rebel against the status quo. Because the Civil Rights Movement posed a threat to those in power in Southern states more so than those outside the South, textbooks in Southern states like Alabama remained tools for reinforcing the status quo. Elsewhere, where the Civil Rights Movement did not pose such a threat, textbooks changed to reflect the demands of civil rights activists.

It may be tempting to dismiss the evidence presented in this study as indicative of an odd or anomalous period in US history. However, Southern

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<sup>38</sup>“Report from ‘old South’ Mobile, Alabama: Desegregation? Yes/no Busing? A little White flight?”, *The Christian Science Monitor* (1976).

states' response to the Civil Rights Movement bears a striking resemblance with the Republican-led curriculum reforms that followed the Black Lives Matters protests of summer 2020.<sup>39</sup> In both cases, mass protest and demand for deep-seated institutional reform prompted politicians who felt threatened by those demands to ensure that the curriculum teaches a narrative that upholds the status quo. As part of this, textbooks that present a critical perspective about the past were labeled as “radical” and “anti-patriotic”; books teaching about institutionalized racism were banned; and conservative politicians promoted curricula that teach children that racial inequalities are neither concerning nor systemic, but rather the product of a few prejudiced individuals.

Fierce fights over history textbooks reflect a widespread and persistent assumption that the curriculum children encounter in school does in fact shape their long-term moral and political values and attitudes. Investigating the validity of this assumption, and the conditions under which curriculum policies succeed or fail to accomplish their goals, are crucial questions for future research.

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<sup>39</sup><https://www.chalkbeat.org/22525983/map-critical-race-theory-legislation-teaching-racism>

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