

Abstract: "Ideology and Education: Economic Education in Texas Public Schools, 1945-1970"

By Jeff Hassmann

On 13 January 1952, a Burton Crane column in the New York Times stated, "Interest in economic education seems to be approaching the proportions of a fad." His article drew from a Brookings Institute study that listed over 200 agencies that conducted economic and citizenship education programs on behalf of their client companies and over 280 companies that engaged in educational activities to benefit both the general public and the their own employees. Some of the largest and most active players in the field included conservative groups like the National Association of Manufacturers and the Foundation for Economic Education. However, the field also included groups like the Joint Council for Economic Education and the Texas Economic Education Council who represented the "vital center" of Cold War economic education. These groups simply sought to emphasize the practical virtues and operations of the free enterprise system.

In the midst of a controversy surrounding the Texas DAR's investigation of "subversive" textbooks in Texas public schools, the Texas Education Agency became active in economic and citizenship education. The 52nd Legislature's charged J.W. Edgar, the Commissioner of the TEA, with promoting citizenship education in the public schools. In complying with the directive Edgar assured the legislature in his 1952-54 biennial report that his agency had made a comprehensive study of the most successful citizenship programs and would continue to explore ways to support teachers in citizenship education.

Conveniently, the Joint Council of Economic Education (JCEE), the Texas Economic Education Council (TEEC) and the University of Texas Extension Division had already made plans to address concerns on the part of businessmen and educators regarding the general public's lack of economic understanding. Their plan emerged out of discussions at eleven workshops for educators hosted by the University of Texas in 1951. What resulted was a pilot program in the Texas Hill Country which intended to "teach 100 selected public school teachers the fundamentals of the free enterprise system, its principles, its advantages and its problems—and to assist them in working this information into their lesson plans and formal curriculum materials." The TEA and public and private universities from around the state offered curricular expertise to help launch six popular workshops for public school teachers during the 1952-53 school year.

The Texas Bureau for Economic Understanding (TBEU), whose contributors more closely fit the political profile of the NAM and its Texas affiliate, offered funding for the pilot project and subsequent workshops and projects that grew in number and sophistication by the end of the 1950s. Although the TBEU continued to see itself in a support role in which "educators should have complete responsibility for all educational functions such as curriculum development, project planning, and teacher training," its desire to more directly enter into what it perceived as the "keen competition for the minds of the youth in this country" became more evident as the programs grew in number and became infused with literature published and distributed by the Foundation for Economic Freedom.

In June 1957 J.W. Edgar and Bob Lawrence, the executive director of the TBEU, convened a separate Statewide Freedom Conference on the campus of Southern Methodist University consisting of nineteen

superintendents from across the state. In his opening address, Edgar delivered a challenge to the superintendents:

American educators, more than any other group, have the responsibility for training youth to understand and make effective use of America's ideological weapons. I believe that American educators generally will rise to the challenge. Speaking for the public schools of Texas, I am quite sure they will. The principal purpose of this meeting today is to inspect through the medium of informal discussion the weapons of our ideological arsenal which must be used in the effectual defense of liberty.

This presentation will explore the journey made by the TEA during the 1950s from its initial involvement in economic education to its cooperation with the TBEU in what even J.W. Edgar believed was ideological warfare. I hope the presentation will prompt discussion of the following broad questions:

1. What role should democratic processes play in determining curriculum and the public values expressed in that curriculum?
2. What role should public historians have in these democratic processes? What role should private citizens have in these processes? Is "indoctrination" always a bad word? Should public historians be in the business of indoctrinating their publics? If so, what should the doctrine look like?
3. Is this story relevant to recent debates about history textbooks?
4. What role did these programs play in the evolution of the grassroots conservative movement in the 1950s and 1960s?

The Historical Society's 2012 Conference

"Popularizing Historical Knowledge: Practice, Prospects, and Perils" Columbia, SC, Thursday, May 31st - Saturday, June 2nd, 2012

Professional historians in the United States are increasingly being called upon to produce more "popular," more accessible history. How do and how should academic historians reach popular audiences? How and to what extent is "popular" history written around the world? Does the meaning of and audience for "popular history" vary from place to place? Along with professional historians, states, elites, and a variety of interest groups have long had an interest in sponsoring, supporting, and generating historical knowledge for popular and other audiences. We seek paper and panel proposals that will consider "popular" history in its various guises and locales. How and to what extent is the interest in "popular" history genuinely new? How do and how should historians interact with television and movie production or write op-ed pieces or blogs or serve as expert witnesses? Is there such a thing as a truly "popular" history? Do we need a distinctive "popular" history and are historians properly equipped to write it?



We especially encourage panel proposals, though individual paper proposals are welcome as well. And our interpretation of "panel" is broad: 2 or more presenters constitute a panel—chairs and commentators are optional. As at past conferences, we hope for bold yet informal presentations that will provoke lots of questions and discussion from the audience, not presenters reading papers word-for-word from a podium followed by a commentator doing the same.

Please submit proposals (brief abstract and brief CV) by December 1, 2011 to Mark Smith and Dean Kinzley, 2012 Program Chairs, at jslucas@bu.edu