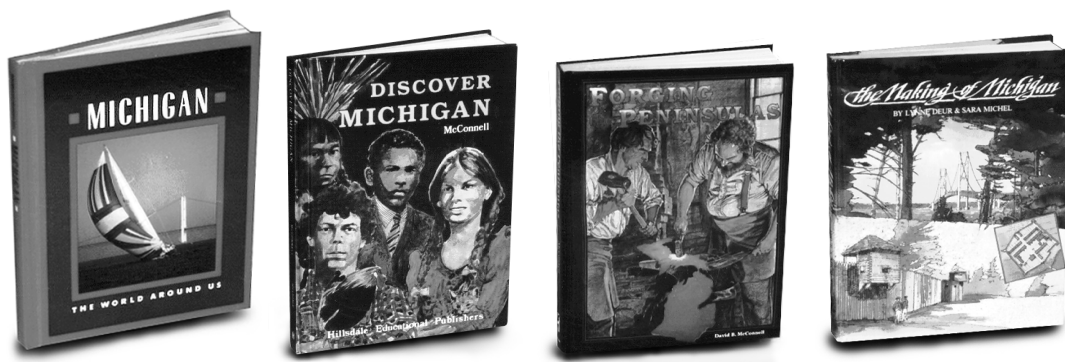


# Are Michigan's History Textbooks Reliable?

by Dr. Burton W. Folsom

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## Executive Summary

When history texts are poorly written, students are merely bored. But when history texts are distorted and biased, students may act on false ideas and live out a lie.

This happened to G. Mennen Williams, whom some regard as Michigan's most influential governor of the 20th century. In high school, Williams read and believed history books that distorted the Industrial Revolution and presented intervention by government as needed to overcome oppression by entrepreneurs. These books, Williams later wrote, "determined me to go out and fight for the underdog." Indeed, as governor of Michigan, Williams strengthened the power of state government to redistribute wealth. However, the histories that Williams trusted were later discredited; the foundation of his philosophy was shattered.

Are the textbooks used today to teach Michigan history more reliable? Most students in Michigan are required to take Michigan history at least once, usually in the fourth grade. This study rates the four available texts in Michigan history for reliability, clarity, and lack of bias.

Of the junior-high texts, David McConnell's *Forging the Peninsulas* received a three-star rating (out of four) because it is reliable, clear, and usually unbiased. McConnell gives excellent coverage to Michigan's early fur and lumber industries; he clearly describes the French and British periods of Michigan history. Finally, he capably narrates stories of the entrepreneurs and businesses that made Michigan a major industrial state.

McConnell could improve his text by explaining more clearly *why* Michigan prospered. After the Constitution of 1850 became law, Michigan had a splendid mix of entrepreneurs, individual liberty, and a state government that protected contracts but stayed out of economic development. Even before assembly lines at Ford cranked out cars for the world, Michigan led the nation in the making of lumber, salt, cornflakes, and carriages.

Also, McConnell's coverage of unions is one-sided. Certainly unions benefited those members who used their collective force to raise their wages. But higher wages also meant, for example, that less capital was available for the auto companies to expand or improve their product. As wages were raised, the increased costs of the finished product were passed on to consumers. The higher costs for cars tended to stifle the hiring of new employees and made foreign cars more attractive. Unions are not always, as McConnell says in his chapter title, "a new friend at the factory."

The chief competitor to McConnell is Lynne Deur and Sara Michel's *The Making of Michigan*, which receives a two-star rating. On the plus side, it is informative and well organized. Students can learn much

about Michigan's political and economic history from this text. On the negative side, Deur and Michel, like McConnell, only give the positive case for unions. Also alarming is that Deur and Michel regularly praise the growth of government in 20th-century Michigan. From worker's compensation to railroad regulation to the New Deal, Deur and Michel describe government as *the* effective solver of problems. They ignore the high taxes and the problems created by failed government programs.

Of the two fourth-grade texts available, one is *Discover Michigan* by David McConnell, the author of *Forging the Peninsulas*. *Discover Michigan* received a two-star rating. The short length and simple style of the book are pluses. So are the clear chronological organization and the many biographical sketches of famous Michiganians. McConnell, however, needs a balanced treatment of unions in his text. He cites no negative effects of unions, only positive ones. Also, McConnell needs to show students that historically government programs—from state-financed railroads 150 years ago to public schools today—come with a cost, and that the citizens of Michigan, even as early as the fourth grade, need to ask if the costs outweigh the benefits.

The other fourth-grade text is JoEllen Vinyard's *Michigan: The World Around Us*. The Vinyard text has many problems and rates only one star. It is gorgeously illustrated with excellent graphics, but its content is weak. Vinyard's work is a product of the multicultural movement; she highlights the "struggles" of Indians, blacks, and women and cuts out much political and economic history. Multiculturalism in and of itself is not bad. Indians, blacks, and women played important roles in Michigan history and that needs to be described in history texts. The problem is that Vinyard uses evidence selectively to make her minorities almost always virtuous and courageous in a world often marred by the misdeeds of white males. Students are urged to see minorities as victims; few heroes and historical role models appear in this text.

Teaching multicultural history to fourth graders has its dangers. Students see the past as a tale of conquest and oppression, not opportunity and hope. Michigan's past is indeed marred by inequities and tragedies. However, more often it has been the story of different groups working together to transform a wilderness into an industrial society that has brought opportunities and an improved standard of living for most people who came here and for their descendants as well. Telling this story in an honest and inspiring way is our challenge.

Students rarely rise above our expectations for them. When history texts present distorted views, the whole learning process is threatened. Instead of a healthy debate over historical issues, we close off certain avenues of discussion and leave the students poorly prepared to cope with different opinions in the outside world.

## *How the Textbooks Were Rated*

- ★★★★ The textbook is clear, well organized, informative, balanced, and unbiased. Students who read this text will receive a useful and balanced introduction to Michigan history.
- ★★★ The textbook is usually informative, clear, well organized, and unbiased. Students who read this text should do occasional outside reading to get a more balanced view of Michigan history.
- ★★ The textbook is often informative but is sometimes marred by distortions and biases. Students reading this text need to do regular outside reading to get a balanced view of Michigan history.
- ★ The textbook is somewhat informative but is also frequently biased in what is covered and how it is presented. Students should read this book with caution and supplement it with much out-side reading.



# Prologue

## ■ *Does the study of history make a difference in how we live our lives?*

A dramatic illustration of the importance of history and history texts is found in the life of G. Mennen Williams, Michigan's only six-term governor. Williams, who promoted an active state government, moved Michigan into the Democratic column during the 1950s. Yet Williams' background was in free-market Republicanism. His grandfather was a successful entrepreneur and founded Mennen soap products.

What caused Williams to change was his history classes at Salisbury Prep School in Connecticut in the late 1920s. Williams read widely in English history and was deeply moved by the critical accounts of the Industrial Revolution. Historians in the 1920s and 1930s were strongly influenced by the writings of John L. and Barbara Hammond. Their books, according to Professor Philip A. M. Taylor of the University of Birmingham, have been "far more influential than Marx in molding the popular British view of history." The Hammonds, in colorful language, argued that the Industrial Revolution was "crowded with overworked children," "hotbeds of putrid fever," and "monotonous toil in a hell of human cruelty."



Photo: Michigan State Archives

**Michigan Governor G. Mennen Williams** built a career on a questionable theory of the Industrial Revolution. History textbooks can make a difference, and it is worth our time to evaluate them.

This view of English history, Williams later said, "determined me to go out and fight for the underdog." An increase in government authority, Williams concluded, would be needed to protect the common man from what the Hammonds called industrial "enslavement." Other influences, of course, touched Williams, too, but when he became governor in 1948, he promoted government intervention in Michigan life more than any other governor the state ever had. He realigned politics in Michigan more than any other person this century; his ideas about an active government still shape political debate in Michigan today.

The irony here is that the Hammonds were later proven to be wrong in much of what they said. The Hammonds had relied on the Sadler Report of 1832 for much of their information on the Industrial Revolution. They called it "one of the main sources of our knowledge of the conditions of factory life at the time. Its pages bring before the reader in the vivid form of dialogue the kind of life that was led by the victims of the new system." Mr. Sadler, we know today, lied in his report. He was a member of Parliament and made up much of his report to gain support for a bill he wanted to see Parliament pass. Economist W. H. Hutt has described Sadler's falsification of evidence. Even Friedrich Engels, comrade of Karl Marx, concluded that "Sadler permitted himself to be betrayed by his noble enthusiasm into the most distorted and erroneous statements."<sup>1</sup>

Some historians today still have a negative view of the Industrial Revolution, but no longer can they use the Sadler Report, nor can they borrow freely from the Hammonds for their information. The Sadler Report deceived the Hammonds; the Hammonds deceived the historians of the 1920s; the historians deceived Williams; and Williams built a career on a questionable theory of the Industrial Revolution. History textbooks can make a difference, and it is worth our time to evaluate them.

# Introduction

“History is bunk,” Henry Ford once said, but Michigan’s schoolchildren have to study it anyway. And well they should because in this case Ford was wrong.

If we don’t know what happened in the past, how can we make good judgments, recognize high standards, or comprehend the world around us? In short, we can’t know where we are going if we don’t know where we have been. Many public schools in Michigan teach a special unit on Michigan history to all fourth graders, and in some school districts, the junior high and high schoolers, too.

Are the schools doing a good job teaching Michigan history? We can’t answer that question until we analyze the texts that students are being asked to read. “A teacher affects eternity,” Henry Adams observed. “No one knows where his influence ends.” What is true for a single teacher is even more true for textbooks because they influence and shape student learning in dozens, sometimes even hundreds, of classrooms each year. To impressionable students, texts are their authorities, their experts. The authors have poured out, in distilled form, the wisdom of the ages that students need to swallow in regular doses to improve their minds.

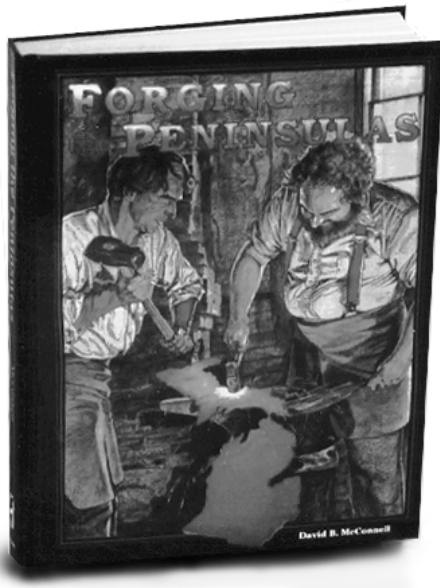
When textbooks present distorted views, the whole learning process is threatened. Instead of a healthy debate over the major issues of life, we close off certain avenues of discussion and leave the students poorly prepared to cope with different opinions in the outside world. Public schools are in the business to teach and train students, not indoctrinate them into a particular ideology.

A major problem in Michigan education today is that the textbooks used to teach Michigan history are sometimes marred by distortions and omissions. This twisting of evidence may have the effect of undermining student faith in America’s economic institutions and creating in the student an unwarranted trust in a strong central government. We want accurate texts, of course, and it’s not right to omit or gloss over failures in our history. But we also want to give our students hope, help them build their character, and show them courage.

The students who read these texts will be Michigan’s leaders in a generation. If we want them to have the initiative, the self-reliance, and the entrepreneurial spirit to lead this state in the 21st century, we need to show students some of the problems created in Michigan’s past when government intervened in the state’s economy, and more of the dramatic accomplishments of free enterprise in the state’s history.

This study will analyze the four major texts used to teach Michigan history. The first two texts are written for junior high or high school students; the remaining two are for fourth graders. Thousands of students each year learn their history from these four books. They are readily available at Central Michigan University, which collects all textbooks used in Michigan’s public schools.<sup>2</sup>

Writing a text is, of course, a difficult task. Organizing and synthesizing massive amounts of information from hundreds of books is very challenging. Making this history readable for fourth and eighth graders also requires great skill and thought. So whatever the quality of these books, the authors are to be commended for attempting something noble and needed.



# *Forging the Peninsulas*

**David McConnell**

The first and most substantial text to be reviewed is David McConnell's *Forging the Peninsulas*.<sup>3</sup> There is much good to be said about this book. Eighth graders—and high schoolers, too—can learn much from it because McConnell's coverage of Michigan history ranges from adequate to excellent. He devotes six of his 14 chapters to the pre-statehood period in Michigan. Two other chapters describe Michigan from statehood to the Civil War. Some may think this too much coverage of the early period, but McConnell does build a strong foundation for understanding Michigan's past. The different Indian tribes, the French settlement, the British conquest, and the American triumph are essential ingredients in Michigan history and all get strong attention from McConnell. Also, his detail on the Yankee exodus to Michigan helps him explain the strong anti-slavery sentiment that made Michigan a center of the underground railroad that gave freedom to so many blacks. After this, three full chapters develop the entrepreneurial period of Michigan's growth from the Civil War to World War I. The two chapters on Michigan from the 1930s to the present are adequate.

McConnell's coverage of key social groups and individuals is also strong. The fur trade brought Indians and French (later British) together and their customs and differences are well developed. Later, McConnell uses the

stories of Sojourner Truth, Adam Crosswhite, Laura Haviland, and Pamela Thomas to describe the anti-slavery campaign and the cooperation between whites (usually Quakers) and blacks that prevailed in Michigan. After the Civil War, industry—and later entertainment—were avenues of upward mobility for many in Michigan. McConnell cites inventor Elijah McCoy and musician Berry Gordy as examples of successful blacks.

McConnell's analysis of Michigan's economic development yields mixed results. His description of the fur trade, the dominant industry in Michigan until the 1830s, is excellent. He also does a good job explaining Michigan's use of its natural resources—lumber, iron, copper, and salt. The furniture and carriage industries, by-products of lumber, are nicely covered. The rise of the auto gets a whole chapter.

McConnell could improve his text, however, by explaining more clearly *why* Michigan prospered. Furs, white pines, iron, copper, and brine all gave Michigan the potential for economic growth. But the environment for investment had to be right, too. Before 1850, Michigan had a strong state government that sometimes discouraged entrepreneurs and private enterprise. After 1850, the state quit the business of economic development and many entrepreneurs came in and flourished. McConnell needs to describe how this happened.

In the fur trade, for example, a government-operated fur company, with a \$300,000 federal subsidy, competed in Michigan with John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company. Astor's firm, with a major depot on Mackinac Island, crushed the inefficient government company. Astor ran a more efficient business. For example, he sent agents to live with the different Indian tribes. His axes, blankets, muskets, and kettles were better quality items than those sold by the government's fur company. While the Indians avoided the government trading posts, Astor dominated worldwide fur markets and became a multimillionaire.<sup>4</sup>

After the government fur company was disbanded, many of Michigan's leaders still believed that strong state involvement was necessary for Michigan's prosperity. Michigan was isolated, cold, swampy, and too far north of the westward migration routes that went through Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. The Tiffin Report, which McConnell describes, was released in 1816 and claimed that less than one percent of Michigan land was good for farming. This document also retarded settlement.<sup>5</sup>



*Photo: Midland County Historical Society*

With few people coming to Michigan, its leaders became committed to a plan of state supported canals and railroads. Good transportation, the state's leaders argued, was essential to attracting settlers. The state government, therefore, needed to build canals and railroads with citizens' tax dollars. In fact, the Constitution of 1835 mandated state-funded internal improvements: "internal improvements shall be encouraged by the government of this state," the constitution read.

**Railroads.** Michigan's early railroads were built by the state government. They were run so poorly that the legislature finally sold them to private entrepreneurs. Most Michigan history textbooks neglect to tell this story.

When Michigan entered the Union in 1837, the legislature met and approved a \$5 million bond issue to fund the railroads and canals. The result was a disaster. The bonds were sold to

the wrong group; the money that came in was misspent; the canals were poorly built and lost hundreds of thousands of dollars; and the two railroads constructed were also poorly built and lost even more.<sup>6</sup>

Michiganians were shocked at the incompetence of these state-run enterprises and wondered why this happened. Here is where a text can help explain to students some benefits of private enterprise and limited government.

When the state builds a project, the incentives are different from those of private enterprise. Satisfying political interests is often more important to legislators than building a railroad that is financially sound and well constructed. State builders use taxpayers' money, not their own. If the road fails, it's the state, not the builders, with empty pockets. The Michigan story is full of accounts of padded vouchers, illegal bidding, cost overruns, and the stealing of materials by contractors and even by the citizens themselves. Since no one actually owned the railroads, no one felt the responsibility to take care of them.

Judge Thomas Cooley, Michigan's most famous 19th-century lawyer and a president of the American Bar Association, observed this waste firsthand. He wrote about it later and said, "By common consent it came to be considered that the State in entering upon these works had made a serious mistake." The people of Michigan, Cooley reported, became convinced "that the management of railroads was in its nature essentially a private business, and ought to be in the hands of individuals." In 1846, therefore, the state of Michigan abandoned all the canals and sold the Central and Southern Railroads, which were only partly completed, to private investors. The new owners promised to do some rebuilding and to expand the lines to the Chicago area. From this distress sale, the state recovered one-half of its \$5 million investment and ended its headaches from being in the railroad business.<sup>7</sup>



Once the railroads had been privatized, they were rebuilt with care and extended across the state. At last, Michigan citizens had the roads they needed to trade and thrive. This turnaround was so startling that its implications were not lost on Michigan voters. They learned from history.

In 1850, Michigan threw out its old constitution and wrote a new one. It read, “the State shall not subscribe to or be interested in the stock of any company, association, or corporation.” Furthermore, “the State shall not be a party to or interested in any work of internal improvement, nor engaged in carrying on any such work” except to provide land.<sup>8</sup> The heavily taxed voters were determined to learn from their mistakes and chart a better future for the state. In the years of laissez-faire that followed, Michigan’s entrepreneurs developed the state’s natural resources—lumber and iron ore—so effectively that Michigan soon became a major industrial state.

McConnell missed the chance to tell the railroad story, but he does describe Michigan’s industrial history after the Constitution of 1850 opened the state for free trade. In the open environment from 1850 to 1910, Michigan rose to become a national leader in producing lumber, furniture, iron, copper, salt, and bromides. McConnell describes many of these developments in detail. In the lumber industry, Michigan inventors and entrepreneurs made their state the leading timber exporter in the nation. McConnell describes Silas Overpack’s invention of big wheels, used to haul logs to rivers, and Scott Gerrish’s invention of the logging locomotive as central to Michigan’s success. McConnell also shows how logging was a means of rapid upward mobility for many; and also an area of mismanagement when forest fires and erosion prevailed.<sup>9</sup>

Students need to understand the importance of lumber to Michigan’s prosperity. A booming lumber industry led to a strong furniture industry, centered in Grand Rapids. Cheap lumber was also central to the flourishing carriage industry, centered in Detroit and Flint. And, of course, the expertise needed to make carriages was later transferred to the making of autos. The triumphs of Henry Ford and Billy Durant made Michigan the heart of U. S. car production. McConnell does a fine job describing Henry Ford—his genius, his stubbornness, his mastery of car sales, and his fall from the top.

McConnell’s final two chapters, covering the last 65 years, need some improvement. McConnell starts by connecting the stock market crash of 1929 to bank closings, and the bank closings to the Great Depression in the 1930s. This connection is valid, but recent scholarship has shown that poor government policies helped start the chain of problems. The Federal Reserve, for example, created artificially low interest rates in the 1920s, and artificially high rates in the 1930s. In the last case, this retarded investment during the economic collapse.<sup>10</sup>

McConnell needs to mention other government policies that plagued Michigan during the Great Depression. For example, in 1930 Congress passed, and President Hoover signed, the Smoot-Hawley Tariff, the highest tariff in U. S. history. This law hit Michigan and the auto industry especially hard. Over 800 items used to make cars were taxed by Smoot-Hawley. Not only did this raise the cost of producing cars, but foreign countries retaliated against our high tariff by refusing to buy U. S. cars. General Motors, Ford, and the other automakers saw vehicle sales plummet from 5.3 million in 1929 to 1.8 million in 1933. Michigan’s economy was in ruins. McConnell notes that the number of workers at the Ford Rouge plant dropped from 98,337 to 28,915 from 1929 to 1933, but he never mentions how the Smoot-Hawley Tariff helped lead to this fiasco.<sup>11</sup>

Once we recognize that poor government policies helped get us into the Depression, we can question whether more government was really needed to get us out. McConnell implies that it was, and he presents only the positive side of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal. “Once Roosevelt was in office,” he writes, “the federal government started a number of programs to help the jobless. The new idea was to create jobs and pay the workers with federal money.” He cites the Works Projects Administration (WPA), which employed 200,000 Michiganders by 1938, and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), which hired 100,000 young men in Michigan to plant trees, build parks, and restore campgrounds.<sup>12</sup>

McConnell omits a description of the tax hikes and deficit spending that were needed to support these programs. If we don’t describe how the money was raised for the New Deal programs, we risk giving

students a false sense of how an economy works. Many students will think, “If we have a depression and lose, say, 300,000 jobs in the auto industry, we can have the federal government come along and hire 300,000 people for the WPA and the CCC and thereby cancel the effects of the depression.” This tactic, however, didn’t work then and doesn’t work now. Unemployment in 1938 was still in double digits. Jobs “created” by the government had to be funded by taxes, and these taxes siphoned capital out of industrial markets.

Roughly speaking, those jobs we “create” by government programs are offset by losses in the taxpaying private sector. As Alan Reynolds points out, “a family earning \$10,000 with four exemptions paid \$40 in 1929, \$416 in 1932.” Roosevelt raised the rates even more: corporate taxes almost doubled; inheritance taxes reached 70 percent on large estates, and top incomes had to pay 90 percent. In 1929, two percent of Americans paid income tax; fifteen years later this increased to 65 percent of Americans.<sup>13</sup> These new tax dollars helped fund the WPA, the CCC, and other federal programs. A textbook would be helpful if it explained some of this to students.



*Photo: Michigan State Archives*

**Taxes.** The New Deal brought many federal jobs to Michigan like the Civilian Conservation Corps pictured above. Textbooks do well in describing these jobs; but no text discusses the tax increases that took place to pay for these programs.

story. Higher wages mean less capital is available for the auto companies to expand or improve their product. Also, if wages are raised, then the increased costs of the finished product are passed on to consumers. Farmers near Muskegon, clerks in Lansing, and bellhops in Grand Rapids had to pay more for cars so that auto workers could earn more. The higher costs for cars put pressure on the auto companies to be competitive. Auto sales, as we have seen, dropped from about 5.3 to 1.8 million from 1929 to 1933. When the United Auto Workers (UAW) secured higher wages during the 1930s, those costs had to be passed on to customers, many of whom could not afford new cars. Also, new employees could not be hired and cheaper foreign cars became more competitive.

McConnell’s analysis of unions would be more balanced if he had made three other points. First, unions usually promote a system of rewards tied to seniority, not merit. Younger, talented workers can lose out in this system, and so does the company that loses full use of their labor.

Unions are important in Michigan history and also in any study of economics. McConnell has a seven-page section entitled, “Unions: A New Friend at the Factory.” As the chapter title implies, McConnell sees unions as an unmixed blessing for Michigan. “Companies had a hard time making profits,” he writes, “so they put pressure on their employees to do more with no increase in pay. Many workers thought unions could help them.” McConnell also says, “Thousands of Michigan workers joined unions after the strike in Flint. Unions became an important way to protect workers’ rights for fair pay and safe working conditions.”<sup>14</sup>

McConnell’s coverage is one-sided. Certainly unions benefited those members who used their collective force to raise their wages. But there is more to the



*Photo: Michigan State Archives*

**The Mackinac Bridge.** As an internal improvement program, the bridge was funded in part by state taxes. In the last 30 years, federal, state, and local governments have grown enormously. From food stamps to education, expansive government has become so significant that it requires special coverage. No Michigan history textbook covers this topic.

family in a right-to-work state has \$2,852 more in purchasing power than a family in a forced-unionism state.”<sup>16</sup>

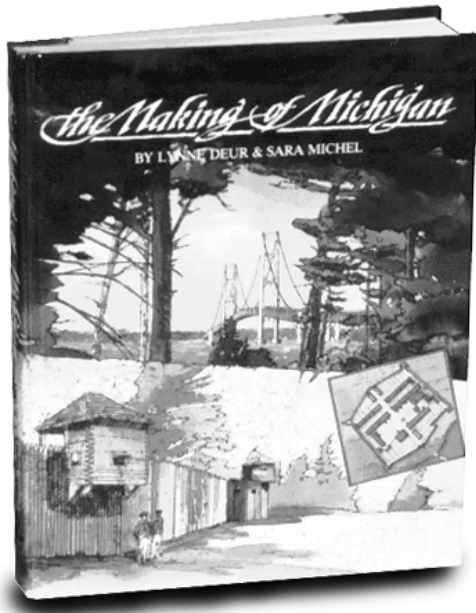
Unions can protect their members and get them more pay, but many others lose in the process. McConnell is right to show the gains of autoworkers, and the unsavory efforts of Ford and General Motors to stop them. But his text would be stronger if he showed the negative effects of unions, too.

McConnell’s last chapter is on “Michigan as We See It Today.” This chapter is too brief on recent political and economic history. In the last 30 years, federal, state, and local governments have grown enormously. From food stamps to federal aid to education, an expansive federal government has become so significant that it requires special coverage.

McConnell says little about the growth of government in Michigan, but he does describe the building of the Mackinac Bridge, a state project, and the construction of highways across the state, which are often federal projects. Whether state or federally funded, these programs mean taxes, and the tax issues have dominated Michigan politics since the 1960s. The state income tax, the single business tax, the intangibles tax, a progressive inheritance tax, and the Headlee Amendment (which limits taxes) are central to political discussions in Michigan in the 1990s. McConnell does not mention these issues; perhaps he thinks that students would be bored by them. If so, he may be right, but as future taxpayers, Michigan’s students ought to learn how much they are paying and what they are getting for their money.<sup>17</sup>

Second, many unions have tended to be racist. The UAW has not been this way, but others have. As late as 1969, for example, 1.9 percent of the members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) were black; only 0.6 percent of the members of the International Plumbers and Pipefitters were black. Other unions had no blacks or Hispanics. In 1972, one study found that 58 percent of local unions of boilermakers, electrical workers, elevator constructors, iron workers, plumbers and pipefitters, and sheet metal workers had no blacks or Hispanics. John Stephen Durham, who has studied the rise of unions, concluded, “in the last decades of the nineteenth century the process of Negro displacement had begun, and trade unions were a most important part of this development.”<sup>15</sup>

Third, states with right-to-work laws often have better records of creating jobs and higher standards of living than in forced-unionism states. Dr. James T. Bennett, of the National Institute for Labor Relations Research, showed in a recent study that “after adjusting for state and local taxes and inflation, the average



**Rating: ★★**

The textbook is often informative but is sometimes marred by distortions and biases. Students reading this text need to do regular outside reading to get a balanced view of Michigan history.

## *The Making of Michigan*

*Lynne Deur and Sara Michel*

The chief competitor to McConnell's *Forging the Peninsulas* is *The Making of Michigan* by Lynne Deur and Sara Michel.<sup>18</sup> These two texts are similar: both are informative and readable; both devote almost half of their coverage to Michigan before statehood; and both are written for junior-high or possibly even high-school audiences. Both texts—especially Deur and Michel's—sometimes express too strong a faith in the ability of the federal government to solve economic problems. *The Making of Michigan*, at 289 pages, is about 100 pages shorter than McConnell's text.

Deur and Michel have written a well-focused book that clearly covers the major periods in Michigan history. They outline the fur trade in Michigan and describe the international fur market that the French and Indians created. Here the authors are rightly skeptical of strong government control. Students reading this text can see how France's problems with a government-enforced monopoly helped the British prevail in North America in general and in Michigan in particular after 1763.

Here is the situation. The French fur trade was established as a monopoly. By fixing prices and restricting the number of traders, the French provided incentives for other Frenchmen and other Europeans to come to America, break the rules, and trade furs at market prices. The Frenchmen who did this were labeled *coureurs de bois*. Deur and Michel describe two of the most famous *coureurs de bois*—Pierre Radisson and Sieur de Groseilliers, who explored Lake Superior up to Hudson's Bay. As Deur and Michel point out, Radisson and Groseilliers "were not forgiven for trading without a license. French officials fined the pair and ignored their stories of Hudson's Bay. The two angry traders later went to Europe and convinced businessmen from England to build trading posts along the bay. The Hudson's Bay Company, formed in 1670, became a leader in the business and gradually helped the British to surpass the French in the fur trade."<sup>19</sup> In other words, France's state-supported monopoly could not withstand British competition.

Government intervention in economic development was also a problem with Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac, a French official who founded the city of Detroit. Cadillac became, as Deur and Michel show, "something similar to a feudal lord of medieval times in Europe." French landowners in Detroit had to pay fees and grain to Cadillac and also work on his farm free of charge. In analyzing Cadillac's state-directed economy, the authors note

The settlement at Detroit did not grow as rapidly as Cadillac had hoped. Cadillac himself was a difficult man for settlers to work with, since he charged high prices and had little compassion in his business dealings. He also had enemies throughout New France who were more than willing to spread news about the settlement's shortcomings. Traders in other areas were angry because he was able to take away much of their business. The Jesuit priests accused Cadillac of using the Indians and giving them alcohol in exchange for furs. Added to these problems was the fact that the French simply were not as interested in settling down and farming or building towns as were people in the British colonies.<sup>20</sup>

Even though the British eventually triumphed in North America, they had poor entrepreneurial skills; and they took the Indians for granted in the fur trade. The British refused to give gifts to the Indians, a custom the French started, and refused to send agents to Indian villages to trade with them directly. Instead, as Deur and Michel note, “the Indians were instructed to bring furs to the British forts. This made the Indians unhappy since it involved more work for them.”<sup>21</sup>

Years after the Revolutionary War, when the Americans took charge of Michigan, they continued much of the British system. In 1796, President Washington promoted a government-operated fur company to compete with the British in Canada. A branch of this company, called a factory, was established at Detroit. Deur and Michel correctly argue that “the factory system did little to lessen the British control of the trade, however. The Indians complained that American goods were not as good as British products, and they resented the American ban on liquor.”<sup>22</sup>

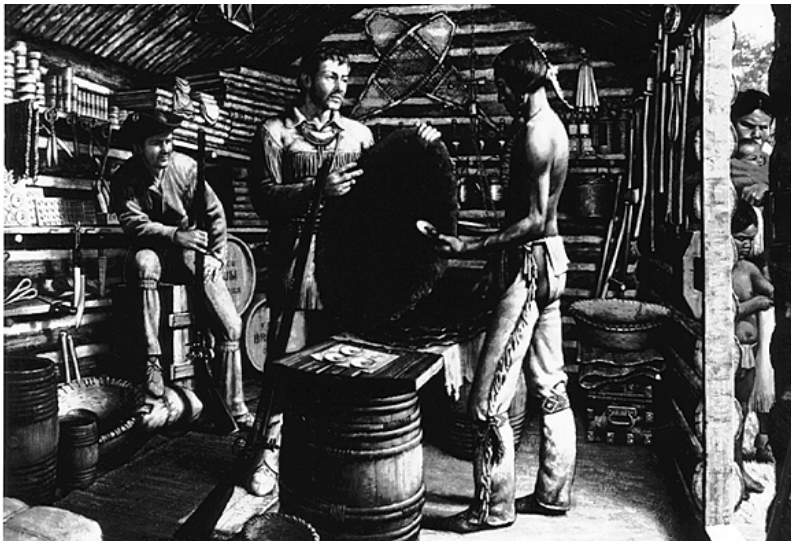


Photo: Michigan State Archives

**Fur Trade.** A government fur company competed with private fur companies in early Michigan. The inefficient government company was later abolished, but few Michigan history textbooks tell this story.

Deur and Michel describe John Jacob Astor, the private fur trader, competing with the government company, but their text would be stronger if they had a fuller discussion of the Astor story. Astor won the competition because he had an efficient vertically integrated company that produced quality products at low prices.

The story behind Astor's triumph reveals much about the workings of an economy. It is also dramatic and would interest students. When Thomas McKenney, head of the government company, began losing money, he lobbied Congress to increase his subsidy and ban private enterprise in fur trading. “What is this,” asked William Woodbridge,

Michigan's territorial delegate to Congress, “but giving to the Secretary of War power to create a Monopoly?” In 1818, Astor's agents on Mackinac Island complained that the factories “have become so numerous and are of late provided with such extensive means, as threatens in a very few years more, to annihilate private competition, and throw the whole trade into the hands of the Government.” To save his business from being swallowed by a government monopoly, Astor urged Congress to investigate the government factories and compare their inefficiency, even with a \$300,000 subsidy, with his efficient and unsubsidized operation. Congress did sponsor an investigation of the government factories and the results exposed McKenney's mismanagement of federal funds. In 1822, Congress voted to end subsidies to the fur factories and McKenney had to close them, sell what was left, and return the proceeds to the government treasury.<sup>23</sup>

The failure of the government fur company is embarrassing, but instructive. Deur and Michel—and McConnell, too—need to tell students this story in more detail. Even the Committee on Indian Affairs in Congress said that this episode was useful to study “not only as a matter of curious history, but for the lesson it teaches to succeeding legislators.”<sup>24</sup> The lesson is that in the world of commerce the profit motive, the structure of incentives, and the stifling tendencies of bureaucrats are such that those businesses run by entrepreneurs will consistently outperform those run by government. The fur trade taught Michiganians this lesson, but they soon forgot it and had to learn it again the hard way when statehood dawned and the railroad era began.

Deur and Michel use several paragraphs to describe Michigan's internal improvement program. They explain that the legislature "passed the bill for the transportation plan and gave [Governor] Mason the power to secure a loan for five million dollars to get things going." As we have seen, however, these government-run canals and railroads failed miserably and cost Michigan's taxpayers dearly. Deur and Michel seem to blame hard times and insufficient government investment. They conclude "The state was able to continue its successful central line westward all the way to Kalamazoo. But by 1846 Michigan officials and citizens had experienced all the railroad building they wanted. Both the central line and the southern line, which went from Monroe to Adrian, were sold to private companies. Under new management, the lines were completed within a few years."<sup>25</sup>

Maybe the problem here was one of too much, not too little, government investment. Let's look at some evidence. The Clinton and Kalamazoo Canal cost \$350,000 to build and earned only \$90.32 in total revenue. The railroads were not much better, according to Robert Parks, the foremost historian of Michigan's early railroads. The Michigan Southern, according to Parks, was "almost worthless. The bed was unstable, the curve too sharp for use of locomotives, and the superstructure too rotten to bear the weight of heavy cars or engines."<sup>26</sup>



Photo: Michigan State Archives

**Entrepreneurs.** Ransom Olds was the first really successful car maker in Michigan. His company also gave the business world the first major example of outsourcing—the process of buying parts and services from other companies—after a fire destroyed his plant and they could no longer make all the parts in-house. Most textbooks do not mention this important fact that began a trend in manufacturing and could be applied today in state and local government in the form of privatization.

Also, what Deur and Michel call the "success" of the Michigan Central was limited as long as the government was running the railroad. Profits on the Detroit to Ypsilanti run were outweighed by long-term structural defects in the railroad. Again, Robert Parks has this to say:

From the time it reached Jackson in 1842, the road's facilities were strained to meet the demand for heavy hauling. Trains were operated at night during seasons of peak demand, although the practice was regarded as dangerous; during the daylight hours, overloaded locomotives were run at twice the recommended safe speed. Under the strain of continuous operation and the jarring impact of high speed on strap iron rails, locomotives and cars were shaken to pieces, and the cost of operation mounted dramatically. Rails were broken and timbers crushed under the heavy loads bouncing over their surface.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, Deur and Michel might want to qualify their statement that "by 1846 Michigan officials and citizens had experienced all the railroad building they wanted." They experienced all the railroad building they wanted *at government expense*. They still wanted Michigan railroads to go to Chicago. When the state sold the Michigan Central, the new private owners had to agree that within three years they would rebuild the road and extend it to Lake Michigan.

Deur and Michel do describe the Constitution of 1850, which barred the state government from building any more railroads. They explain that "Lawmakers wanted to make sure that the mistakes of the internal improvement program did not happen again."<sup>28</sup>

With the Constitution of 1850 in place, Michigan's "era of entrepreneurs" began. Deur and Michel clearly describe the growth of lumber and iron in Michigan. The crucial offshoots of these industries—furniture, carriages, stoves, and autos—also receive good coverage. The results for Michigan were national prominence and sharp economic growth. As the authors note, "In 1850 about one percent of Michigan's workers had what could be called factory jobs.

By 1900 that figure had risen to twenty-five percent.”<sup>29</sup>

Deur and Michel give solid coverage—ten pages—to the auto industry, which was the capstone of Michigan’s industrial success. Many historians argue that advantages of location and resources determine which cities and states will prosper. But this view overlooks the role that entrepreneurs have played in overcoming disadvantages and redirecting the flow of raw materials. Cities from Chicago to New York could have become auto centers, but entrepreneurs in Detroit prevailed over all contenders.

The authors conclude that “Henry Ford and William Durant and David Buick and Ransom Olds happened to be Michigan people who...gave the industry the spark it needed and helped to make Michigan a new industrial leader.”<sup>30</sup> Telling the stories of those entrepreneurs—and that of others such as Will Kellogg in cereal and Scott Gerrish in railroads—helps students appreciate economic growth. And it gives them the sense that they, too, can overcome adversity and make something of their lives and improve the world. The story of entrepreneurial success is the story of hope, and this is what Michigan had plenty of in the late 1800s.

One of the most dramatic trends in 20th-century America has been the growth of the federal government. Deur and Michel believe that the federal government *needed* to increase in size and scope of operation. “Toward the turn of the century,” they write, “the problems of the poor and the selfishness of the wealthy gradually forced Americans into action.” The authors tell the students that “Life was no longer simple. If America was to survive these [industrial] changes the government had to begin to step in with laws that would help bring order to the confusion.”<sup>31</sup>

Deur and Michel are right to say that serious problems existed. Could private enterprise have solved some of these problems? Was more government really necessary for “America to survive”? Michigan’s two previous experiments with government in the economy—the fur trade and the railroads—were both colossal failures. Only when the role of government in Michigan was dramatically and constitutionally curtailed did Michigan’s economy begin to prosper and expand. This fact puts a strong burden of evidence on the advocates of more government intervention. Certainly there were problems in Michigan’s expanding economy of the later 1800s. But more government may not have been the best solution.



Photo: Michigan State Archives

**Unemployment.** The authors write that during the 1920s prices for goods had risen higher and higher. Due to this “inflation,” unemployment rapidly increased. Actually, from 1923-1929, during Calvin Coolidge’s presidency, inflation was at a remarkably low one percent per year and unemployment averaged only three percent per year. In fact, Coolidge had the lowest “misery index” of any of the last fifteen presidents.

1930s. The authors tell the students that “A government which did not serve the needs of the people, [Couzens] felt, needed changing. One of his accomplishments [as mayor of Detroit] was setting up city-owned and operated streetcar and bus lines. These served the people much more completely and cheaply than private lines had done.”<sup>33</sup> No evidence, however, is presented for this assertion.

An expanding government means higher taxes, and Deur and Michel have to deal with Senator Couzens’ public stance for a high progressive income tax. They describe his famous battle with Andrew Mellon, the U. S. Secretary of Treasury, who masterminded the tax cuts of the 1920s. According to Deur and Michel, “Mellon, one of the richest men in the country, worked to make income taxes lower for wealthy people.”<sup>34</sup> That’s because Mellon worked to make income taxes lower for *all* people.

To be balanced Deur and Michel need to point out that during the 1920s, Mellon secured *eightfold* cuts for lower incomes and only *threefold* cuts for higher incomes. The authors might have also mentioned that after the Mellon tax cuts (1) 98 percent of Americans paid no income tax whatsoever, (2) more federal income tax revenue came to Washington after the tax cuts than before, and (3) that during the 1920s the U. S. ran budget surpluses every year.<sup>35</sup> Making these points would give students a chance to hear both sides of the issue.

On the subject of the Great Depression, Deur and Michel seem to say that private enterprise pushed us in and government bailed us out. There are three parts to their argument.

First, during the 1920s, “Prices had gone higher and higher.”<sup>36</sup> This is an unfortunate slip. Actually, prices were very stable in the 1920s. During Calvin Coolidge’s presidency, from 1923 to 1929, inflation averaged a remarkably low one percent per year. Few presidents this century have had such low inflation rates.<sup>37</sup>

Second, Deur and Michel argue that this allegedly rapid increase in prices helped cause unemployment. The problem here is that unemployment under Coolidge averaged only three percent per

Two examples that Deur and Michel give of the necessity for government intervention—worker’s compensation and railroad regulation—are very argumentative. Many historians, for example, such as Albro Martin and Forrest McDonald believe that regulation stifled the creativity of the railroads and led to their decline. Michigan’s workmen’s compensation law, passed in 1912, made employers liable for accidents to employees on the job. Michigan’s previous law was in the old English common law tradition that said employers were liable for damages only if they were the cause of the accident. Michigan’s new worker’s compensation law was copied by other states, but that alone doesn’t make it a blessing. When employers pay damages for accidents caused by careless employees the costs of doing business rise and all consumers, rich and poor, must pay.<sup>32</sup>

Deur and Michel’s bias toward a strong central government is also apparent in their discussion of James Couzens, a U. S. Senator from Michigan in the 1920s and



year. In fact, inflation and unemployment both were so low under Coolidge that he easily has the lowest misery index (which is derived by adding the inflation and unemployment percentages) of any of the last fifteen presidents.<sup>38</sup>

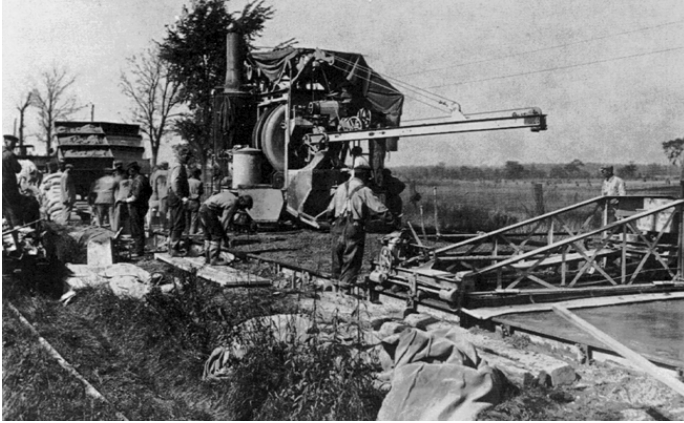
Third, Deur and Michel repeat what economists label “the underconsumption thesis,” the idea that America in the late 1920s had too many high priced goods and too few people who could afford to buy them. This interpretation dominated the textbooks for many years. Recently, however, the statistical evidence on consumption in the 1920s has been more widely publicized. The data show that the ratio of consumption to national income did not fall, but actually rose slightly during the 1920s. As economist Peter Temin of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has pointed out, “The concept of underconsumption has been abandoned in modern discussions of macroeconomics....”<sup>39</sup>

The authors’ problems with causes of the Great Depression are repeated when they describe Presidents Hoover and Roosevelt and the New Deal. Deur and Michel assert that Hoover “was convinced that things would get better if the government kept out of it.” Recently, historians have been abandoning this view. Hoover helped create the federal Farm Board (funded at \$500 million) to fix farm prices, and the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (funded at \$1.5 billion) to give emergency loans to banks, railroads, and other corporations. To pay for these and other government programs (such as new public works projects), Hoover and Congress sharply hiked income tax rates, which transferred money from private enterprise to government. In fact, Roosevelt himself accused Hoover of “reckless and extravagant” spending, of thinking that “we ought to center control of everything in Washington as rapidly as possible,” and of presiding over “the greatest spending administration in peace times in all our history.”<sup>40</sup>

More government programs came when President Roosevelt began the New Deal. Deur and Michel say that “[b]y 1934 the New Deal was beginning to improve conditions throughout the country.”<sup>41</sup> As we have seen, however, in analyzing the McConnell text, government programs did not get America out of the Depression.

On the subject of unions, Deur and Michel defend them not with evidence but with carefully constructed language: “In these hard times [the Great Depression], workers saw the need to organize and demand higher wages.”<sup>42</sup> By writing that workers “saw the need” for unions, the authors imply to students that unions are naturally a good thing. Evidence is not needed; unions are simply the sort of thing that Michigan people “saw the need” to have.

Such enlightenment was apparently contagious. The authors next tell us that “About the same time, the federal government saw the need for workers to organize and bargain for better wages.”<sup>43</sup> Twice told, the lesson for students is obvious: Sensible people see the need for unions. Deur and Michel may not have intended to convey that idea this way, but that is how it may come across to many students.



*Photo: Michigan State Archives*

**Highways.** In the years following World War II the federal government began building interstate highways. In Michigan, history textbooks present the subject in such a way that it encourages students to believe that we need to rely on government to give us things we need.

therefore, must increase and government must provide programs.

Right away one fact challenges this theory. From 1900 to 1930, the population of Michigan doubled, something it has not done in the years since then. Detroit even spiraled from 285,704 to 1,568,652 during the 1900-1930 period.<sup>45</sup> Yet no significant tax increase took place. Entrepreneurs and urban politicians largely built the services and the infrastructure for Michigan's influx of people in the early 1900s. The growth of government—at the state and national level—took place mainly after 1930, when Michigan's rate of growth began to decline.

The section on modern Michigan in the Deur and Michel text is short. In it, the authors praise the growth of government. In describing the administrations of Governor G. Mennen “Soapy” Williams (1948-1960), they formulate the issue this way:

One of Michigan's most serious problems during Williams' terms was finding new ways to raise more money. The state's three percent sales tax did not bring in enough money to take care of the increased services needed by a growing population. Governor Williams worked to place a tax on people's incomes as well as a tax on large industries.<sup>44</sup>

What is strongly implied here is that when population grows, government must step in to provide “needed” services. Private enterprise can't do the job. Taxes,



*Photo: Michigan State Archives*

**Growth and Taxes.** From 1900 to 1930, the population of Michigan doubled, something it has not done in the years since. Yet no significant tax increase took place. Entrepreneurs and politicians largely built the services and the infra-structure for Michigan's influx of people in the early 1900s. The growth of government—and taxes—took place after 1930, when Michigan's rate of growth began to decline.

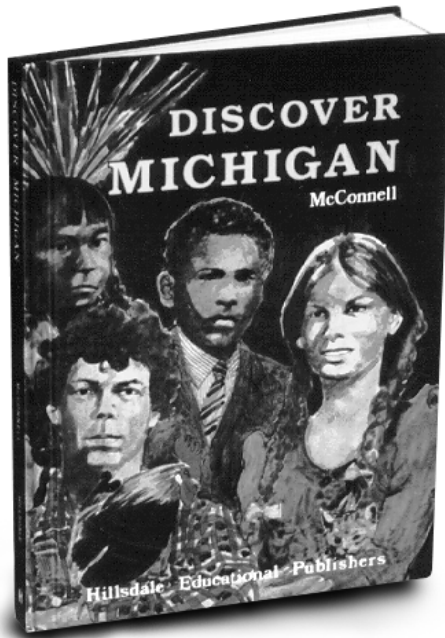
for Public Policy, Stephen Moore and Dean Stansel demonstrate that the fastest growing cities in Michigan in the 1980s were the ones with the lowest tax rates.<sup>47</sup>

One final point about taxes in modern Michigan concerns the issue of building highways. According to Deur and Michel, "Great strides were also made in transportation in the years following World War II. A highway program begun in 1957 gave the state miles of nonstop driving free of tolls. These interstate highways, paid for largely by the federal government, link Michigan with other states. They also link cities and towns in the Lower Peninsula."<sup>48</sup> This explanation seems to suggest that Michigan is getting its interstate highways free from the federal government. Such a presentation encourages students to believe that we need to rely on government to give us things we need.

The truth is that Michigan has long paid into the federal government more in gas taxes than it has received back in highways. John Taylor, in a study for the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, shows how the allocation formula puts Michigan at a disadvantage with other states. In 1992 (the most recent year for available data) Michigan paid \$698 million in gas taxes to the federal government and received back just \$382 million from the Highway Trust Fund. In other words, Michigan would be much better off if it built and maintained its own interstate highways.<sup>49</sup> That provocative statement could be used in the classroom to challenge students to think about taxes and economic development. Some students might even think of new ways to use human creativity and individual initiative to solve Michigan's problems.

What about the quality of government services that have grown in Michigan since 1930? Often they have been so poor that cities throughout the state—and even the state itself—have begun privatizing government agencies. For example, the state Accident Fund, county landfills, wastewater treatment plants, school busing, and garbage collection are among the many services being privatized throughout the state. When Mayor Woodrow Stanley of Flint simply threatened to privatize garbage collection in the city, the union offered to save almost \$1.5 million from the \$6.2 million budget for garbage collection through increased efficiencies.<sup>46</sup>

Cities that don't privatize usually have high taxes. Today, the city of Detroit refuses to privatize any city services, and it imposes a tax rate seven times higher than the average for all Michigan municipalities. In a study done for the Mackinac Center



## Discover Michigan

**David McConnell**

Two fourth-grade texts are widely used in Michigan. The first is *Discover Michigan* by David McConnell, who also wrote the more advanced text *Forging the Peninsulas*.<sup>50</sup> McConnell's fourth-grade text is much shorter and simpler in style.

His organization is probably very good for fourth graders. First, he has a clear chronological narrative that hits the main themes of Michigan history—the Indians, the French settlement and the fur trade, the British, the American triumph, Michigan statehood, and industrial development. Second, he sprinkles biographical sketches throughout the text. For example, Marquette, Cadillac, Pontiac, Tecumseh, Joe Louis, Henry Ford, and Walter Reuther all get separate biographies. For children (and even adults) telling stories about people is a good teaching technique. It can also be a way of reinforcing values and good character.

McConnell's historical coverage has its strong and weak points. The early economic history of Michigan is well done. McConnell shows the importance of the fur trade in

### Rating: ★★

The textbook is often informative but is sometimes marred by distortions and biases. Students reading this text need to do regular outside reading to get a balanced view of Michigan history.

French-Indian and British-Indian relationships. The later history, the rise of industry, is also done capably. The students read about lumber, copper, and iron ore in the 1800s and autos in the 1900s. Most of the 20th-century section is weak. McConnell has almost no coverage of Michigan after World War II. The last four chapters of the fourteen chapter text are not historical. They discuss such things as farming, traveling, and living in Michigan today.

Texts for fourth graders, of course, must be short and easy to read. Authors can't go deeply into complicated material. Even so, McConnell could have done something to show students the difference between economic development through private enterprise and economic development through government or government subsidies. McConnell does not mention the government-operated fur company and its financial problems. He also omits the story of the state-built railroads and canals, and how and why the legislature privatized Michigan's railroads. Governor Stevens T. Mason, who helped sponsor the state-railroad fiasco, was practically chased out of the state. McConnell, however, without supporting evidence, says Mason "led the state well."<sup>51</sup>

McConnell needs a balanced treatment of unions in his text. He cites no negative effects of unions, only positive ones. "The workers wanted a say in how much they were paid. They wanted to have a say



Photo: Michigan State Archives

**Leadership.** Governor Stevens T. Mason, who helped sponsor the state-railroad fiasco, was practically chased out of the state. McConnell, however, says Mason "led the state well."

if people were fired. Today, most people feel unions are good. They keep the bosses from being too powerful. Unions help the workers have better jobs and more pay.” The problems with these arguments have been described earlier. Therefore, it might be best just to analyze this statement McConnell later makes “Michigan now has some of the most powerful unions in the world. The auto workers have some of the highest pay in industry anywhere.”<sup>52</sup> For balance, McConnell needs to go one step further. High-priced labor means higher-priced cars. Higher-priced cars mean high costs for cars to all Americans, whether they be rich or poor, in a union or not. In this sense, the auto unions have caused problems for most Americans, not to mention the opportunities that America’s high-priced labor—and management costs, too—have given to Japanese car makers.

McConnell’s lack of balance on unions mars the appeal of his text. Readers, even fourth graders, can see the faulty logic. Some of them will ask, “If unions can get us more money, why would the economy ever get in trouble? If we just pay unions and workers more money, won’t everyone be happy?” Students find no answers to these questions in the text.

Along the same lines, McConnell needs to explain to students the historical rise of big government, what this has meant in higher taxes, and the historical problem of government in stifling economic development in Michigan. Fourth graders, for example, already know they pay a sales tax (6 percent) on things they buy in a store. When and why did Michigan get a sales tax? Where does that money go? Schools are not free. Where does the money come from, and why have per-pupil costs risen so sharply in the last 30 years? Students would find it interesting to learn that every time their parents fill the family car with gas they are paying about 40 cents a gallon in state and federal taxes. On this subject, students might wonder why Michigan sends more gas revenue to Washington than it gets back in highways.<sup>53</sup> These are major political issues today, and they have roots deep in Michigan’s past. McConnell’s text would be better if he talked about some of these issues.

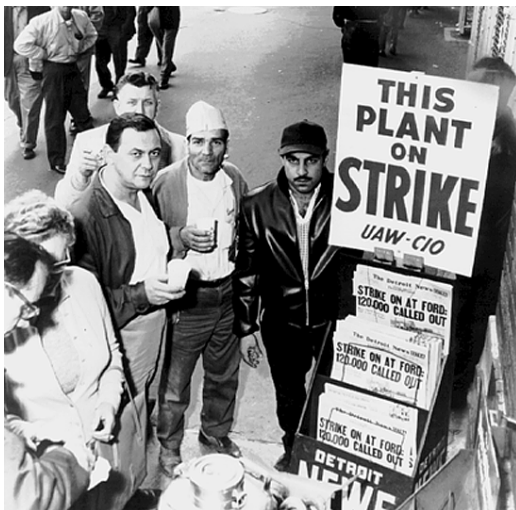


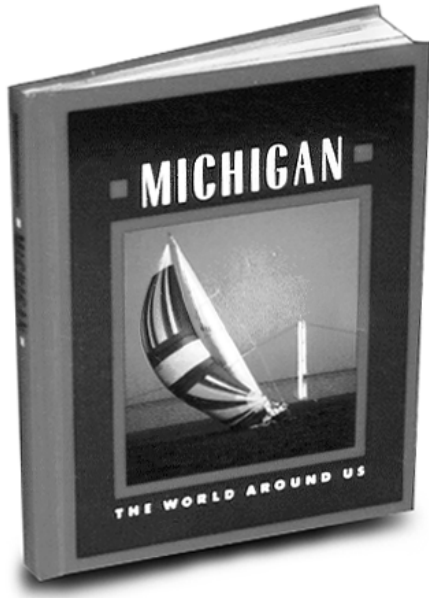
Photo: Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University

**Unions.** Unions came to play a large role in Michigan during the 1930s. These Michigan history textbooks describe the contributions of unions; no text, however, discusses the problems they have created.



Photo: Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University

High-priced labor means higher-priced cars. Higher-priced cars mean high costs for cars to all Americans, whether they be rich or poor, in a union or not. Even fourth-grade readers may ask questions about the logic of unions, asking, “If unions can get us more money, why would the economy ever get in trouble?” Michigan history textbooks offer no answers to this question and many others concerning labor relations.



# *Michigan: The World Around Us*

*JoEllen Vinyard*

The other fourth-grade text is JoEllen Vinyard's *Michigan: The World Around Us*, which is intended for use in history and social studies.<sup>54</sup> The Vinyard text is a classic example of the axiom "You can't judge a book by its cover." It is gorgeously illustrated with colorful pictures, high quality paper, and excellent graphics. In appearance it is the best of all the Michigan history texts. In content, however, it is the worst.

## **Rating: ★**

The textbook is somewhat informative but is also frequently biased in what is covered and how it is presented. Students should read this book with caution and supplement it with much outside reading.

The problem is not with the author's abilities. Vinyard is an established historian with solid credentials. The problem is her decision—and that of her advisors—to make the text follow the recent trend toward multiculturalism, whereby the "struggles" of Indians, blacks, women, and other minorities are stressed at the expense of traditional political and economic history. Multiculturalism in and of itself is not bad. Indians, blacks, and women played important roles in Michigan history and that needs to be described in history texts. What's bad is that Vinyard uses evidence selectively to make her minorities almost always virtuous and courageous in a world often marred by the misdeeds of white males.

Vinyard begins her historical section with three chapters largely devoted to the story of Michigan's Indians.<sup>55</sup> How the Indians lived and how they related to the incoming whites (French, British, and American) is interesting and worthy of description. Sometimes, however, Vinyard's narrative lacks balance. Indians are noble and courageous; they have admirable cultures; they work well together; and they protect the environment. The whites came and undermined Indian culture with the fur trade and later "forced" them off their land and out of Michigan. Her description could be improved with three changes.

First, the Indian tribes were not always united. It's true, in early Michigan history the Chippewa, Ottawa, and Potawatomi worked together harmoniously; but the Iroquois and Huron fought each other to the death to be middlemen in the fur trade. Later the Chippewa and Sioux battled for land in the Michigan and Wisconsin territories. When Thomas McKenney, superintendent for Indian Affairs, visited the Great Lakes in the 1820s, he described in detail a Chippewa woman who had been scalped during a Sioux raid on her tribe.<sup>56</sup>

Second, Indian culture was more than hunting, trading, and protecting the environment. It was also scalping, torturing, and killing one's rivals. Vinyard neglects this side of Indian culture, but it needs to be explained so that students can understand why the American settlers were so anxious to push the Indians westward, or onto reservations.

Vinyard would be more credible if she sometimes described the darker side of Indian life. During Pontiac's Rebellion in 1763, for example, the Chippewa and Sauk tricked the British soldiers and captured their fort. Here is Vinyard's account:

The Indians used a clever plan to capture Fort Michilimackinac. They knew that the British king's birthday was on June 4. A Chippewa chief suggested to the fort commander that the Indians and the British join together in a celebration. As part of the celebration, some visiting Sauk Indians would play a ball game against the Chippewa outside the fort.

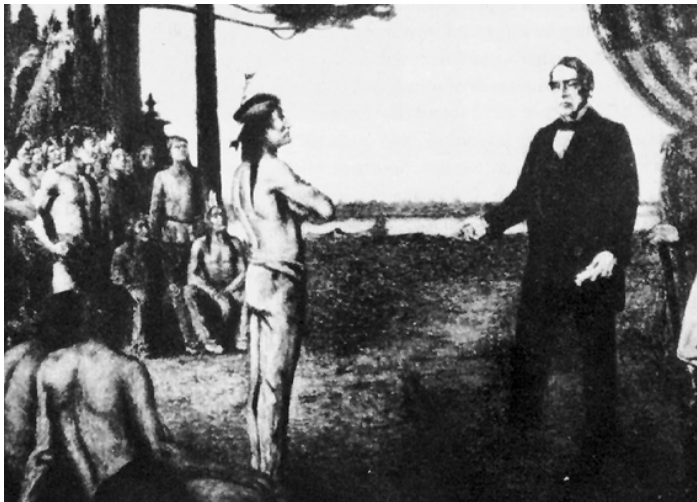
On June 4 the soldiers came out of the fort to watch the game. Chippewa women stood around the fort wrapped in their blankets. The Chippewa and the Sauk began their game of *baggataway*, which was similar to lacrosse.

At one point, the wooden ball was thrown into the fort. The players rushed in after it. As they passed through the gates of the fort, the players grabbed the weapons that the women were holding under their blankets! Once inside, the Indians easily took control of the fort.

The Native Americans fought bravely to defend the land and the freedom that the British were taking away from them.<sup>57</sup>

What is absent here is the massacre of the 20 British soldiers and one trader when the Indians entered the fort. Alexander Henry, a fur trader, hid in the attic of a house, saw the massacre, and described it this way:

Through an aperture which afforded me a view of the area of the fort, I beheld, in shapes the foulest and most horrible, the ferocious triumphs of barbarian conquerors. The dead were scalped and mangled; the dying were writhing and shrieking under the unsatiated knife and tomahawk; and from the bodies of some, ripped open, their butchers were drinking the blood, scooped up in the hollow of joined hands and quaffed amid shouts of rage and victory.<sup>58</sup>



**Native Americans.** Officials negotiated voluntary treaties with Indians, a fact often overlooked in Michigan history texts.

Potawatomi to Kansas.<sup>59</sup>

Vinyard treats the River Raisin massacre during the War of 1812 in a similar way. “Angry troops,” Vinyard writes, “met the British and Indians in a battle on the River Raisin, near present-day Monroe. Although many soldiers from both sides died, the Americans lost the battle. The next morning, Native Americans returned to the River Raisin. Angry that so many of their people had died in battle, they attacked the wounded American soldiers left on the battlefield.”

Here, at least, Vinyard admits an attack took place. What's missing is (1) the fact that the British, under Colonel Henry Proctor, promised protection from Indians to the wounded Americans, and (2) that 200 Potawatomi Indians did not just “attack” the wounded, but scalped them, murdered them, and burned the houses where they were lodged. No wonder so many whites in Michigan were anxious after the war to move the

Third, Vinyard is not accurate when she argues at length that “by 1836, they [the Indians] had been forced to sell the entire peninsula to the government.” It is fair to criticize the American negotiators as

two-faced (as were the Potawatomes at River Raisin) and manipulative (as were the Chippewas at Fort Michilimackinac). Neither Indians nor whites had a monopoly on virtue. But “forced” is the wrong word to use. It’s true that pressure and bribes sometimes helped convince Indian chiefs to leave. But the Michigan story is one of the various Indian groups signing treaties voluntarily, though sometimes reluctantly. Sometimes the U. S. government did not fulfill its treaty obligations, and this is a point of legitimate criticism. But according to historians Willis F. Dunbar and George S. May, the Indians were often paid well for land that had low market value. “Up to 1880,” Dunbar and May point out, “the total cost to the United States government of the public domain acquired from the Indians amounted to \$275,000,000, and the surveys of the land had cost another \$46,000,000. Total receipts from the sale of these lands to that date were \$120,000,000 less than these expenditures”<sup>60</sup>

Herman Viola, a historian of the American Indian, describes an 1826 treaty with the Chippewas (of Fort Michilimackinac fame) this way:

The Chippewas accepted the terms [of the treaty] without a murmur. [Lewis] Cass [Michigan’s territorial governor] and [Thomas] McKenney [Superintendent of Indian Affairs] promptly signed the document, the superintendent with his usual bold strokes and splendid flourish. Shingaubas Wasson next stepped forward and signed; he was followed by eighty-four chiefs and warriors in what seemed to McKenney an endless procession.<sup>61</sup>

Shingaubas Wasson, the first Chippewa to sign the treaty said this to his people: “Our Fathers have come here to embrace their children. Listen to what they say. It will be good for you. If you have any Copper on your lands, I advise you to sell it. It is of no advantage to us. They can convert it into articles for our use.”<sup>62</sup>

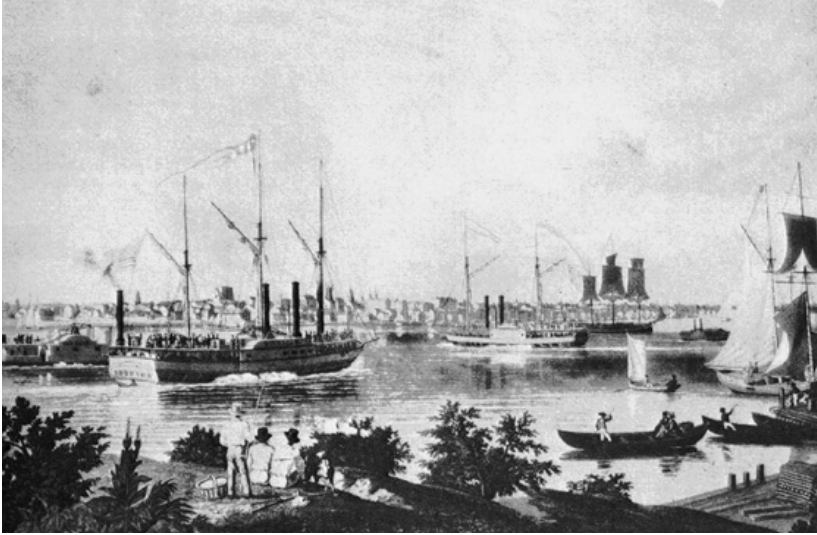
This analysis of the Chippewas is important because Vinyard discusses them more than any other tribe. “They were forced to give up their land to the United States government. . . .”<sup>63</sup> Vinyard insists in a two-page “Point-Counterpoint” section that asks students to evaluate the evidence on Chippewa fishing rights. But if students are not given the best evidence that *each* side has to offer, how can they make informed decisions?

Vinyard’s treatment of blacks in Michigan history also needs more work. “During the 1600s,” she writes, “many thousands of Africans were captured by armed Europeans and shipped across the Atlantic in chains.” As John Newton and other slave traders pointed out, the Europeans usually stopped in designated ports to pick up the Africans, who had been captured and were being sold by other Africans. Armed ships were more the exception than the rule. Next, Vinyard has the slaves being shipped to “the tobacco and rice fields of the British colonies.” In fact, most went to the sugar fields, and not in the American colonies but in the West Indies and Brazil.<sup>64</sup>

These two misunderstandings are not critical. The major problem is that Vinyard often substitutes black history for traditional political and economic history. For example, her chapter on “Michigan and the Civil War” is largely a discussion of Michigan *blacks* and the Civil War. The same is true with chapter 8, lesson 1 on immigration to Michigan. In this section, Vinyard devotes 89 lines of text to African-American migration to Michigan and only 86 lines to all of the European immigration to Michigan. Yet her map of Detroit on page 190 shows how small the African-American community was.<sup>65</sup>

In chapter 8, lesson 2, “The Progressive Era, [1900-1920]” Vinyard shifts from an unbalanced treatment of blacks to an unbalanced treatment of women. Of the 117 lines in the lesson, 49 are on women in the Progressive Era, 58 are on Hazen Pingree, a liberal reform governor, and 10 lines summarize both Pingree and the women. The traditional Progressive-Era issues of railroad regulation, child labor, the income tax, and direct election of senators are completely absent from the chapter.<sup>66</sup>





**Environment.** With outdated information, the author implies that our forests are being depleted and that the Great Lakes are also environmentally vulnerable. This misleading information can frighten young students, making them think that they and their families are in danger. Actually, timber acreage and production are both increasing and a study found that both Lake Michigan and Lake Superior are four times cleaner than they were in 1970.

geography and Paul Bunyan legends. Also, much of the material inserted between chapters has little historical relevance. Perhaps the graph section on pages 138-139 can help students learn about population. But the Teacher of the Year insert on page 150, the cause-and-effect section on pages 222-223, and the how to read a newspaper section on pages 258-259, and several others are only very peripherally related to history or social studies—and consume space that could be used for historical material.

Space could also be saved by cutting the material on faddish topics. Vinyard's coverage of the environment, for example, is lengthy, one-sided, and outdated. Our forests are not being depleted, as Vinyard implies; in fact, timber acreage and production are both increasing. "Acid rain has become one of the most serious environmental problems facing the United States today," Vinyard warns. The Great Lakes, she says, are especially vulnerable. This interpretation, however, was discredited in the 1980s in a \$500 million scientific study called the National Acid Precipitation Project (NAPAP). After ten years of careful research, the expert scientists involved in the study concluded that there is very little evidence that acid rain damages forests or crops.<sup>68</sup>

The NAPAP study also found that American lakes and streams were in much better shape than the EPA and other critics had assumed. Michigan's Great Lakes, for example, not only passed the acid-rain tests with ease, but Lakes Michigan and Superior register four times cleaner than they were in 1970.<sup>69</sup> We still need to be responsible toward the environment, and it's fine for Vinyard to say that to students. But she needs to present a balanced view that doesn't frighten students with outdated information.

In choosing to write multicultural history, Vinyard gives only limited space to economic development in Michigan. Her lesson on "The Birth of the Auto" is brief but informative. The longer lesson, "The Rise of the Unions," presents unions as unmixed blessings. Being consistent with her multicultural slant, Vinyard gives more words to Catherine Gelles, a rank-and-file UAW member, than to Walter Reuther, the UAW president. What is ignored in her discussion are the problems with the seniority system in unions and the sometimes sharp increase in costs to consumers of union-made products.

Chapter 9, Vinyard's last chapter, covers 70 years of Michigan history in only 17 pages.<sup>67</sup> The last four pages, the modern part, are completely devoted to African-Americans and the civil rights movement. Civil rights issues are important and need to be described, but not to exclusion of everything else. Students need to know other things about the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

Vinyard might argue that she was pressed for space and therefore couldn't include anything but civil rights material. Also, she might argue, the section on Michigan government has some modern material in it. Both statements may be true, but she could have saved dozens of pages of space by cutting or reducing the non-historical material. The first 20 percent of the text (57 of 292 pages) covers

Vinyard praises government intervention in the economy. She closes her lesson on “The Great Depression” with these words:

When the good times of the 1920s came to an end, the United States entered the Great Depression. Many Michiganians lost their jobs and faced great poverty. The government helped many people to survive by providing jobs.<sup>70</sup>

Government, however, as we have seen, only provides jobs by raising taxes. These New Deal taxes on income, bank checks, telephones, autos, and even grape concentrates simply transferred funds from the private to the public sector. Unemployment was still shockingly high in the late 1930s. Vinyard’s text would be more balanced if it included this kind of information in a paragraph or two.

In her section on “Building Skills” Vinyard has students do the following assignment.

Now apply what you have learned. Read each pair of sentences below. Tell which sentence states the cause and which sentence states the effect.

- ▶ The New Deal programs put thousands of Michiganians to work.
- ▶ The United States government started the New Deal.<sup>71</sup>

What’s needed for balance is a third sentence: “The tax increases during the New Deal put thousands of Michiganians out of work.” Vinyard effectively presents one side of the issue; students would benefit from hearing the other.

# Conclusion

Most public schools in Michigan require fourth graders and sometimes older students to take a course in Michigan history. Students need to understand the past, the argument goes, so they can be prepared citizens in the future. The texts used to teach Michigan history, however, do not always describe the past in a reliable and responsible way.

On the positive side, students can learn some useful information about Michigan history from each of the four textbooks used in the schools. The McConnell books, which are the best, show clearly the stages of economic development in Michigan from furs to lumber to autos. Deur and Michel's book does too. All four texts have useful material on Henry Ford and the rise of the auto industry. On the subject of political development,

all four texts show clearly the transition from French to British to U. S. dominance in Michigan. In the McConnell texts and in the Deur and Michel text almost half the material is on Michigan up to statehood in 1837. Michigan's roots are important and there is some merit in this decision.

On the negative side, the major problem is that of distortion. With few exceptions, students only learn one side of the issue on the growth of government and the rise of unions. The authors do not dwell on these issues, but students come away thinking that government was indispensable to solving economic problems and that unions were an unmixed blessing for Michigan.

In making these arguments, the textbook authors neglect abundant historical evidence from Michigan's past. Two of Michigan's earliest industries—furs and railroads—had dramatic experiments with government intervention and both were disasters. Private investors greatly outperformed a government-operated fur company and the state-built rail system. Michigan citizens, in fact, were so disgusted with the \$5 million failure with the state-built railroad and canal system that they rewrote the state constitution in 1850 to limit involvement by the state of Michigan in future economic development. Michigan students need to hear this story, but it is covered only briefly in the four texts.

The rise of Michigan's economy to national and international prominence occurred after the state was constitutionally barred from interfering with economic development. Michigan lumber, copper, brine, furniture, and autos became popular throughout the world during the 70 years after the constitution of 1850 became law. The failure of government-directed enterprises in early Michigan history and the rise of Michigan to international prominence in a relatively free-market era ought to make the textbook authors question more seriously their praises for the growth of government in the 20th century.

The authors tell us that the New Deal was needed to get the country out of the Great Depression. But the high taxes, the failed programs, and the continued high unemployment are almost completely ignored. Unions are always presented as a friend of the Michigan worker. But what about those workers who were excluded from unions, especially minorities? And what about the higher costs of union-made products to all consumers, rich and poor alike? There are two sides to these stories and students, who after all are in school to learn, ought to hear both sides.

As stated earlier, when textbooks present distorted views the whole learning process is threatened. Instead of a healthy debate over historical issues, we close off certain avenues of discussion and leave the students poorly prepared to cope with different opinions in the outside world. Public schools are in the business to teach and train students, not indoctrinate them into a particular ideology.

Maybe we need to have a new author emerge and write a better text for students on Michigan history. Or perhaps the existing authors will improve their products. Three of the four textbook authors have read this study and we have exchanged pleasant letters. David McConnell even said he is already using this "analysis of my textbooks to change and improve future editions."

McConnell's books are the best of the Michigan history texts because they provide the most reliable historical information. Except for his sections on the growth of government and unions, McConnell is usually well balanced. His narrative is readable and some of his photographs are excellent.

Vinyard's text is the worst. It is well designed and is written by a qualified historian; but it has within its covers the worst excesses of the modern multicultural movement. It presents the story of Michigan Indians and blacks in a one-sided manner. This is sad because when all the facts are in we find much heroism and courage among Indians and blacks in Michigan's past. We can tell this story in a dramatic and inspiring way without making these groups victims or glossing over their shortcomings. When we misrepresent the history of Indians, blacks, women, and white males—even if it is from the best of motives—we not only hide the truth from students, we increase the tension in class among the different groups and decrease the chances that students will see Michigan as a place where they can dream dreams and see their visions come to pass.

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## ENDNOTES

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