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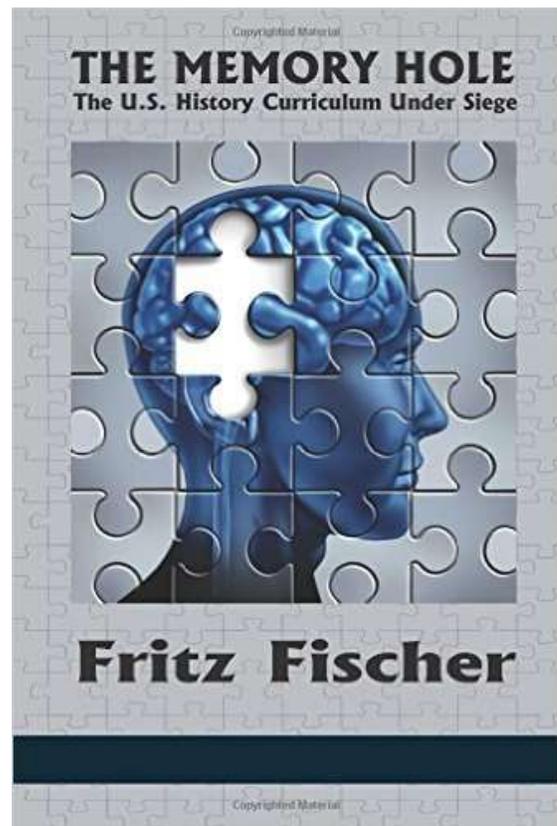
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Reviewed by Steven D. Drouin, Ed.D.
San Jose State University

Fritz Fischer's *The Memory Hole: The U.S. History Curriculum Under Siege* unmask how politicians and political analysts are using shoddy history to undermine and attack U.S. history curriculum. The scope of the manuscript entails several specific controversial eras and ideas, such as the Founding Fathers and Ronald Reagan. Fischer uses these flash points to highlight how erroneous historical scholarship is being used by political activists and politicians to further their own agendas. Each chapter compares contemporary historical understandings of the topic with the writings of a few outlier thinkers. These fringe thinkers are shown to commit historical sins such as: cherry picking quotes, purposefully ignoring sources, relying on oversimplified frameworks, and de-contextualizing the experience of historical figures, to construct purposefully misleading interpretations of the past. Fischer argues such subpar history is negatively impacting the teaching of U.S. history in a variety of ways.

In chapter one, Fischer grapples with curriculum surrounding the Founding Fathers. He begins by juxtaposing the body of sound historical scholarship on George Washington's prayer at Valley Forge with that of politically conservative quasi-



historians such as David Barton and W. Cleon Skousen. Fischer outlines how Skousen and Barton use misleading history to argue “the founders intended the country to be based on evangelical Christian religion” (p. 10). He then shows how these ideas have been used by conservative politicians such as Ron Paul, Paul Ryan, and Michelle Bacchman to push for policies such as the creation of a national “Religious History Week” and the implementation of state standards which frame the Founding Fathers as intent upon creating a country based on evangelical Christian religion.

In the second chapter, Fischer follows a similar pattern of unmasking, this time concerning Robber Barons and the New Deal. Historical accounts of the economic history of the U.S. such as *The Myth of the Robber Barons* and *New Deal or Raw Deal* by conservative Burton Folsom, retell the story of American economic history, framing free market capitalism as the hero ages. Fischer shows how conservative politicians such as Rick Perry, Michelle Bacchman, and Sarah Palin then use this notion of the free market as a champion for only good. In a particularly noteworthy connection, Fischer shows how David Barton, conservative quasi-historian, served as an expert standard reviewer for the Texas State Board of Education, whose chair Don McLeroy stated, “Our new history standards teach the benefits of free enterprise; they highlight the failures of planned economies” (p. 39). Such examples build the case that overly simplistic interpretations of the past are having real world consequences on how students will learn history in classrooms.

In chapter three, Fischer highlights how right-wing visions of American Exceptionalism have been used by various conservative historians and politicians to advocate for the teaching of the uniqueness and goodness of the U.S. while erasing any notion of the U.S. as an imperial power.

Chapter four exposes the negative impact one-dimensional historical narratives of the 1950’s can have on students’ ability to construct true history. Such unbalanced narratives present historical characters such as Joseph McCarthy, Herbert Hoover, and Phyllis Schlafly as working tirelessly to maintain social stability in turbulent times at the cost of a true exploration of the complexity of the age.

In chapter five, Fischer turns his attention toward left-wing historians and their attempts in using the teaching of history as a political weapon. Fischer argues Howard Zinn's approach at history from the bottom, most famously showcased in *A People's History of the United States*, comes at the expense of a balanced account of the past. In addition, the existence of such left-wing history has inspired in kind right-wing revisionist history such as Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen's *A Patriot's History of the United States*.

In chapter six, Fischer concludes by arguing that scholars, academics, and politicians from the left and right have touted narrow and incomplete interpretations of the presidency of Ronald Reagan for ideological gain. He ends by suggesting history teachers present and ask students to evaluate versions from both sides.

There is much value to the scholarship Fischer has conducted. Instructors of U.S. history would benefit greatly in knowing the politics of their curriculum. Fischer provides numerous examples of how the "beleaguered hero" (p. xvi) of the book, the discipline of history, is being purposefully misused to influence textbooks and content standards. Many young teachers rely upon both the textbook and standards to frame their practice as they find their footing in the field. Furthermore, if trends in merit and/or value added pay continue to catch footing, then all teachers of history have a vested interest in understanding how and why their state content standards are being influenced.

Fischer's work is also useful in the classroom to help frame good and bad versions of historical scholarship. From unbalanced narratives, like *A People's History of the United States* and *A Patriot's History of the United States*, to gross oversimplifications of complex issues like *America's Providential History's* one paragraph interpretation of the New Deal, the book is rife with comparisons of how the teaching of history should and should not be conducted. If teachers' are looking for examples of scholarship for students to critique, then *The Memory Hole* is a fantastic resource.

There are several areas in which Fischer's work seems to fall short. Reading the manuscript, it is clear there are several influential and politically active scholars, politicians, and organizations influencing and attempting to influence the instruction of history.

In the first two chapters, the connection between bad history and the instruction of teaching in the classroom is made apparent through numerous explicit examples. Such connections are less strong in subsequent chapters. In the latter chapters, Fischer tends to highlight how inaccurate interpretations are truly bad history, but with more tenuous links to actions in classrooms. It is clear in chapters like “The Misuse of American Exceptionalism” that a battle is raging over history, but this does not necessarily mean sound classroom instruction is destined to be its casualty. Early on Fischer contends “The history being taught in American school is in danger” (p. xi). However, as the book progresses it become less clear about the context and extent of the danger.

A second consideration is the work focuses largely on right-wing attacks on history. Four of the six chapters target conservative activists almost exclusively, while the remaining two chapters included criticism of both the left and right. To be fair, Fischer does supply a scathing and well-researched critique of leftist historian Howard Zinn’s influence on the field. Perhaps conservative activism to limit the perceived liberal bias in the teaching of history has resulted in more concrete actions for Fischer to analyze. For example, the release of the new 2014 Advanced Placement framework for the instruction of history prompted an outcry from conservatives across the nation. In August the Republican National Committee released a resolution stating, “The framework presents a biased and inaccurate view of many important events in American history.” In several states including Oklahoma, Georgia, Nebraska, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas, conservatives have called for a review and/or ending of Advanced Placement history (Ganim, 2015). In Colorado, the State Board of Education Chairman Paul Lundeen characterized the changes as “radically revisionist.” Fischer, the chair of the committee, which wrote the Colorado state standards in 2009, entered the fray stating the framework did not differ radically from Colorado’s then current state standards (Silvy, 2014). This is by no means proof of an inherent bias in Fischer. In stark contrast, it highlights the only pure ideology that Fischer appears to be fighting for is the proper instruction of the craft of history.

The Memory Hole seeks to raise awareness of the contentious context within which U.S. history curriculum finds itself today. Deeper than this, the book tries to reestablish and reaffirm the specific rules that govern the proper execution of historical scholarship at all levels. In both of these goals, the work is a success.

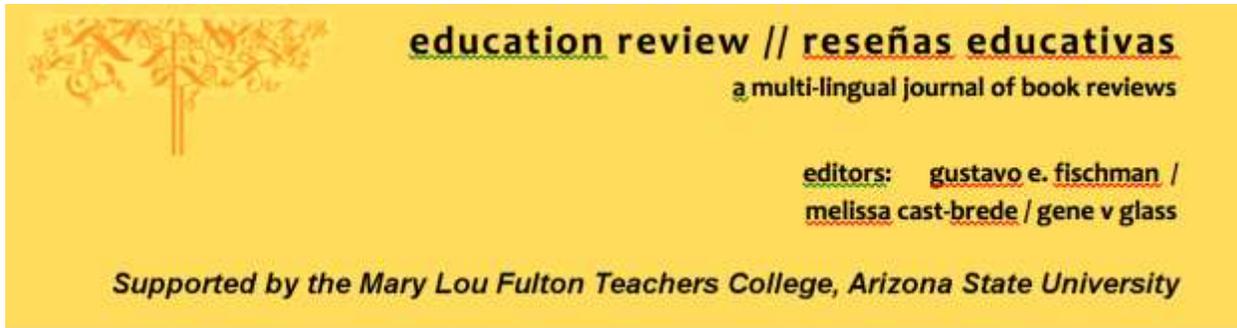
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About the Reviewer

Steven D. Drouin EdD
San Jose State University
steven.drouin@sjsu.edu

Steven D. Drouin taught high school history for nine years and is currently adjunct faculty at San Jose State University in the Department of Secondary Education. His academic interests include social studies education, narrative theory, race, and detracking.



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