



# Whitewashing War: Historical Myth, Corporate Textbooks, and Possibilities for Democratic Education

*Christopher Leahey*

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## **Whitewashing War: Historical Myth, Corporate Textbooks, and Possibilities for Democratic Education** Christopher Leahey

*Whitewashing War* explores perhaps the most critical issue social studies educators presently face: How do we teach our students about war? In this timely book, Christopher Leahey investigates how the political struggles over the social studies curriculum, the corporate domination of the textbook and testing industry, and the curricular constraints of the No Child Left Behind Act combine to stifle historical inquiry and deprive students of meaningful social studies instruction. Using the controversial Vietnam War as a case study, Leahey holds textbook narratives up to the light, illuminating how the adoption process, interpretive framework, and selection of evidence combine to transform the past into thinly veiled historical myths. By attending to questions traditionally ignored in history education, this dynamic book:

- Challenges educators to rethink their pedagogical approaches to military conflict, American and otherwise.
- Calls on teachers to develop students' critical sensibilities to ask questions, conduct research, evaluate evidence, and make meaning of the past.
- Provides classroom lessons for history educators and students to engage in rich, intellectual encounters with the historical record.

**Christopher R. Leahey** teaches world history in upstate New York. His articles have appeared in *Social Education* and *The Social Studies*.

"If students are to be prepared for the challenges of the 21st century, then we need to provide inspired, interdisciplinary instruction that can provide the skills, values and knowledge to enable our future citizens with the possibility, promise, and perspective to transform their world. *Whitewashing War* provides that solid interdisciplinary framework for teachers and students to teach and learn about the myth of war."

### —Critical Education

"Leahey echoes a concern expressed by others that history textbooks fail to address the realities of war."

### —CHOICE

"The crowning achievement of *Whitewashing War* is that it clearly illustrates the necessity of pursuing rational answers about why things are as they are (or were as they were). It becomes clear upon reading this book that, if we help our students pursue rational answers in the course of creating personally meaningful

understandings of the world, they will figure out just what it is that needs to be done.”

—From the Foreword by **E. Wayne Ross**, University of British Columbia

“The author has done a masterful job of exploring issues of historiography, pedagogy, textbook debates, and critical thinking. Through a deep examination of two historical turning points in the Vietnam War, he has contrasted the known facts of these periods with the accounts contained in the textbooks.”

—**Rick Ayers**, Graduate School of Education, UC Berkeley

“A passionate and powerful analysis. Christopher Leahey provides penetrating insight into how Americans teach about their wars. As such, his book is an invaluable aid to understanding the past and its connection to our current predicament.”

—**Fredrik Logevall**, Cornell University

“*Whitewashing War* challenges the fundamental assumptions underlying the corporate regime of standards, textbooks, and testing and exposes the distortions, manipulation, and lies that result. Leahey builds a compelling case for critical inquiry and dialogue. Highly recommended!”

—**Ronald W. Evans**, San Diego State University, author of *The Social Studies Wars*

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