

## SOCIETY



*Thanks to beer and fast cars, some of today's western youth are as dangerous to themselves as the The Wild Bunch (1969) were to others.*

low and the influence of the Mormon Church is strong.

Finally, the authors blame violent deaths among Western youths on "the rural white ethos of the American West." This cowboy mentality, they say, emphasizes "outdoor machismo, individualism, risk taking, conspicuous athleticism, danger seeking and nature conquering."

### *Multiplying Errors*

"The Nine Lives of Discredited Data" by Diane B. Paul, in *The Sciences* (May-June 1987), The New York Academy of Sciences, 2 East 63rd St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

College textbooks have changed dramatically during the past 20 years. Until the mid-1960s, textbook authors were academic specialists who wrote to ensure their reputations in their field.

Paul, an associate professor of political science at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, contends today's textbooks are "slicker, more elaborate, and more expensive" than in the past. They are also less demanding.

The quadrupling of community college enrollment (to 2.5 million students) between 1960 and 1970 created a new market. Community college instructors, faced with ill-prepared students, demanded that textbooks not only be "dumbed down" to 10th-grade levels, but also that they have such "bell and whistle" supplements as slides, photographs, and tests.

Textbook authorship has also changed. Instead of being written by

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scholars, textbooks are increasingly authored by free-lance writers. Their work is then edited by experts and "market knowledgeable" reviewers chosen "for their preferences as consumers" of textbooks.

Because developing new textbooks is quite expensive (a \$500,000 budget is not uncommon), many publishers model new texts on successful predecessors. Many textbook authors "crib" by plagiarizing other textbooks. Because dozens of textbooks compete for each market, plagiarists "can feel secure that their sources will not be easily identified."

Plagiarists often copy errors. For example, British psychologist Cyril Burt claimed that intelligence differences are primarily genetic. Burt's research was challenged in 1976 and proven fraudulent three years later; yet 19 of 28 genetics textbooks published after 1978 cited Burt's data as true. Some textbooks even use Burt's research as "evidence" in one section—while denouncing Burt in another.

Textbook publishing will become increasingly competitive in the future, as markets decline due to shrinking college enrollments. Instead of improving texts, publishers are adding more frills and increasing marketing budgets. Intense competition, Paul warns, has created a world where "textbooks are being produced and sold like toothpaste."

### *A Homeless Crisis?*

"The Homeless Issue: An Adman's Dream" by Martin Morse Wooster, in *Reason* (July 1987), 2716 Ocean Park Blvd., Ste. 1062, Santa Monica, Calif. 90405.

How many homeless people are there in the United States?

Homeless advocates such as Mitch Snyder, head of the Community for Creative Non-Violence (CCNV), claim that between two and three million Americans lack a place to live. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) estimated in 1984 that there were between 192,000 and 586,000 homeless people in America.

The debate over numbers, says Wooster, a *Wilson Quarterly* editor, is not just academic. Estimates of massive homelessness are being used to justify a \$500 million "emergency" federal aid bill pending in Congress.

The dispute began in 1982, when the CCNV published *Homelessness in America*, a report that tried to show that the number of U.S. homeless "could reach 3 million or more during 1983." The CCNV produced this figure not by counting homeless people, but by collecting anecdotal evidence from several major cities.

The government countered the CCNV with a 1984 HUD report alleging that between 250,000 and 350,000 people were homeless "on an average night in December 1983 or January 1984." HUD researchers did not count the homeless either, but relied instead on four estimates derived from newspaper articles and surveys of shelter operators.

HUD analysts based one estimate of homelessness on news reports written as much as two years before the December 1983 "snapshot" date. Shelter operators also gave HUD widely ranging estimates; citing their claims, HUD stated that the homeless in New York numbered between 12,000 and 50,000 and in Los Angeles between 19,500 and 39,000.

While Snyder has attacked HUD's report as "a political document"