



**Figure 12** A revolutionary grab bag

The additions to the new Texas standards on the Revolutionary War include both Episcopalian Founding Father John Jay (left) and African American martyr Crispus Attucks (right) . . . and a Lutheran and a Catholic, two famous women, a black schoolteacher, a Peninsular Spaniard, and a Jewish financier. What is the logic behind this grab-bag approach to history education?

## CHAPTER 12

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# A Perfect Storm in Austin and Beyond

## Making the Case—and Place—for US History in Texas and the Nation

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“From Lone Star State to Laughing Stock State” lamented former Texas Lieutenant Governor Bill Hobby in March 2010 as Texas lurched toward producing its new social studies standards.<sup>1</sup> Expressing frustration and embarrassment at the ostensible trumping of history by ideology, this scion of a bipartisan Houston political dynasty reflected, and perhaps attempted to deflect, the negative reactions of so many inside and outside the state. Comedians and other critics had a field day, to be sure, but what transpired during the meetings of the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) was no laughing matter. At the end of the day, with legitimate historians and experienced teachers effectively cut out of the process, the will of the social conservative majority triumphed. Although the history that Texas schoolchildren are now mandated to learn and be tested on does follow a conventional narrative in some respects, it also displays an odd blend of head-scratching particulars, misleading revisionism, and outright invention, wrapped neatly in the flags of American and Lone Star exceptionalism. Moreover, the 2010 standards overemphasize content—easily politicized—while paying scant attention to the skills associated with learning how to think historically.<sup>2</sup> In the end, the prescribed history reveals far more about the present than the past, much more about contemporary cultural politics than the nature and value of historical understanding.

Many external observers have argued that the stakes could not be higher, that these standards would weigh heavily on how history is taught across the entire nation because Texas is the largest unified purchaser of K-12 textbooks and publishers therefore must produce materials according to its specifications. Yet given the 2011 state budget cuts that likely will prevent Texas from actually