

## FOLK HISTORY, ALTERNATIVE HISTORY, AND FUTURE HISTORY

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Many history teachers are searching for new resources to add vitality to their instructional efforts. In some public schools and universities, creative, educational materials--including taped interviews, games of military strategy, and telephone conferences with elected officials--are being introduced to provide more stimulating learning experiences for students in survey history courses. One can find the results of many of these approaches reported in recent issues of The History Teacher, the AHA Newsletter, Teaching History, and the Network News Exchange. Some optimistic observers of the field of historical pedagogy have asserted that such new teaching thrusts toward student-centered investigation mark the initial steps in revitalizing interest in history classes. Those who are more critical, and more pessimistic after reviewing recent trends in enrollment figures, staffing policies, job opportunities, and other negative aspects of the history profession, argue that even the current wave of instructional innovation comes too late to save Clio's craft from impending demise. The following essay suggests three out-of-the-ordinary teaching approaches and instructional resources which might help history teachers to stimulate their students to think critically and reflectively about the past, present, and future.

### Folk History

The function of the balladeer in Western Civilization is universally understood and appreciated. One can readily identify historical values in the oral sagas of Robin Hood, John Henry, and Joe Hill, or the social commentary communicated in gospel hymns, in slave work songs, and in the tunes which echoed the history of the construction of the Erie Canal. Clearly the examination of the lyrics of American songs can enhance the study of the past.<sup>1</sup> In reflecting on the musical contributions of contemporary singers, several writers have contended that popular performers such as Bob Dylan function as balladeers for this age of anxiety.<sup>2</sup> Although the music of the 1960's and 1970's undeniably lacks universal historical perspective as a reliable social barometer, it does offer creative history teachers a variety of opportunities to compare and contrast the validity of contemporary pieces of lyrical commentary with the evidence provided by numerous other oral and written resources.

The use of a "folk history" teaching approach should serve two instructional goals. First, recordings can be utilized to introduce historical units. A teacher can illustrate the nationalistic fervor related to Andrew Jackson's 1815 victory over the British by playing Johnny Horton's "Battle of New Orleans." Similarly, Lonnie Donnegan's humorous tale of shipping contraband pig iron on the "Rock Island Line" or Tennessee Ernie Ford's description of company town tactics from the perspective of a hard-nosed coalminer who produces "Sixteen Tons" per day would be valuable commentaries for a unit dealing with late 19th century economic history.

A second use of "folk history" recordings might be to contrast the values presented in various lyrical descriptions of the same historical event. For example, the Indochina conflict, a war which spawned deep social division in the United States for nearly a decade, can be lyrically presented in sharply contrasting images. The valor of American soldiers and the value of patriotism is highlighted in Merle Haggard's "Okie from Muskogee," Barry Sadler's "Ballad of the Green Berets," and Terry Nelson and C Company's "The Battle Hymn of Lt. Calley." On the other hand, anti-war hostility and distrust of political duplicity by the American government can be illustrated through Country Joe McDonald's "I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-to-Die Rag," Bob Dylan's "With God on Our Side," and Barry McGuire's "Eve of Destruction."

The following popular recordings should be considered as instructional materials to stimulate classroom discussion and reflection about the historical topics listed below:

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Popular Music Resource</u>
The Battle of New Orleans	Johnny Horton, "The Battle of New Orleans" (Columbia 41339)
A Civil War Incident	Joan Baez, "The Night They Drove Ole Dixie Down" (Vanguard 35138)
Labor Problems in Coal Mining Communities	Tennessee Ernie Ford's "Sixteen Tons" (Capitol 3262)
Railroad Tariff Policies	Lonnie Donegan, "Rock Island Line" (London 1650)
John F. Kennedy During World War II	Jimmy Dean, "P.T. 109" (Columbia 42338)
Criticism of War and Segregation	Peter, Paul, and Mary, "Blowin' in the Wind" (Warner Brothers 5358)
Criticism of Super-Patriotism and Militarism	Odetta, "With God on Our Side" (RCA 3324)
The Assassinations of Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., and John F. Kennedy	Dion, "Abraham, Martin, and John" (Laurie 3464)
The Assassination of John F. Kennedy	Tommy Cash, "Six White Horses" (Epic 10540)
The Valor of Vietnam Soldiers	Barry Sadler, "The Ballad of the Green Berets" (RCA 8739)
The Kent State Incident	Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, "Ohio" (Atlantic 2740)
The Trial of the "Chicago Seven"	Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, "Chicago" (Atlantic 902)
Criticism of Public and Private Hypocrisy	Barry McGuire, "Eve of Destruction" (Dunhill 4009)
Black History	B. B. King, "Why I Sing the Blues" (Bluesway 61024)

#### Alternative History

"Alternative history" is intellectually demanding for both students and professors. It offers each student the opportunity to pursue fascinating "What if . . .?" questions and encourages a learner to speculate about the potential ramifications of pseudo-historical events. As the professional historian knows, the multiple ripples on the surface of a pond are often of more interest and ultimate consequence than the single falling stone which generated them. The "alternative history" methodology encourages a student to suggest novel situations in a heretofore stable past; but it also requires that

he or she accept the responsibility for developing logical speculations about the nature and meaning of the alternative past which has been created. What if Abraham Lincoln had not been assassinated in 1865? What if the automobile had never been invented? What if Nazi Germany had triumphed in World War II. The topical options are endless. But the history instructor who directs student exploration in an altered historical setting must guide his class carefully. Random judgments, arbitrary guesses, and unsubstantiated or anachronistic observations must be censured either by the teacher or by the other "speculative historians" in the class.

This instructional approach stresses elements of historical methodology which are rarely discussed in high school or even in college survey courses. The brilliance of Carl Becker's capsule definition of a historian--"A person who thinks otherwise"--can be put into pedagogical form. Although the format may be rather strange, the academic skills being evolved are historically sound, perhaps even traditional. Each student must cite potential sources of information about their "new" past event; each student will also have to note the kinds of political, economic, social, intellectual, and religious responses which would result from the prescribed historical alteration; and, finally, each student must be forced to assume an evaluation role between "what was" and "what might have been" in terms of articulating what he or she considers to be the better historical circumstance in respect to mankind's eventual development. These questions are intriguing and difficult. However, the stimulation achieved through researching the results of actual events in order to judge the prospective consequences of an altered past should launch a new creative atmosphere in the history classroom.

The construction of alternative histories can be introduced by reading, analyzing, and criticizing any of the speculative fiction stories listed below:

<u>Historical Alterations</u>	<u>Speculative Fiction Resources</u>
Columbus sails off the edge of the world.	Philip José Farmer, "Sail on! Sail On!" in <u>Worlds of Maybe</u> , edited by Robert Silberberg (New York, 1970), 77-88.
Santa Anna spares the men at the Alamo.	R. R. Fehrenback, "Remember the Alamo," in <u>Analog I</u> , edited by John W. Campbell (New York, 1964), 66-76.
The Confederacy triumphs in the Civil War	Ward Moore, <u>Bring the Jubilee</u> (New York, 1953).
The automobile is never invented.	R.A. Lafferty, "Interurban Queen," in <u>Survival Printout</u> , edited by Leonard Allison, Leonard Jenkin, and Robert Perrault (New York, 1973), 138-149.
Nazi Germany triumphs in World War II.	Philip K. Dick, <u>The Man in the High Castle</u> (New York, 1964).

#### Future History

There are two categories of "future history" which deserve consideration as innovative instructional techniques. The first might be labelled "Exploring the Present From the Future." To initiate this teaching method history students should assume the role of an "outside investigator" of contemporary American life, perhaps as an historian from Mars or an American time traveler from two hundred years in the future. This technique challenges a student to shed his or her ethnocentric bonds and to assume a more objective view toward the contemporary

social and political system in the United States. Hopefully, students will begin to recognize the difficulty of applying historical judgments to present-day events and activities without having the benefit of decades of perspective. Readings which can help to introduce this instructional approach might include:

- Issac Asimov, "The Dead Past," in Beyond Control: Seven Stories of Science Fiction, edited by Robert Silverberg (New York, 1972), 173-236.
- Arthur C. Clarke, "History Lesson," in Great Science Fiction Stories, edited by Cordelia Titcomb Smith (New York, 1964), 162-171.
- Arthur C. Clarke, "Report on Planet Three," in Report on Planet Three and Other Speculations (New York, 1972), 3-10.
- Lester del Rey, "To Avenge Man," in The Ninth Galaxy Reader, edited by Frederik Pohl (Garden City, New York, 1966), 125-162.
- Robert Silverberg, "Translated Error," in Transformation II: Understanding American History Through Science Fiction, edited by Daniel Roselle (Greenwich, Connecticut, 1974), 140-161.
- Leo Szilard, "Grand Central Terminal," in Great Science Fiction by Scientists, edited by Groff Conklin (New York, 1962), 291-296.
- Robert Moore Williams, "Robot's Return," in Anthropology Through Science Fiction, edited by Carol Mason, Martin Harry Greenberg, and Patricia Warrick (New York, 1974), 80-90.

The second category of the "future history" approach might be labelled "The Grand Design of the Future." To introduce this teaching strategy a student should be instructed to create a future (one of many possible alternatives) based upon his or her extrapolation of past events and present trends. Issues ranging from the stability of human nature to the results of technological growth offer students boundless territories for exploratory reasoning. The key to achieving instructional success with this approach, however, lies in the history teacher's ability to convince the class that rigorous intellectual discipline is required to develop shrewdly calculated projections. Of course, the history instructor is also obligated to introduce the ultimate problem of "chance happenings" or "unpredictable events" once students begin to mold fairly stable schemes for social evolution.

Various speculative sources which could be utilized to launch this innovative approach include:

- Ray Bradbury, "August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains," in In Dreams Awake: A Historical-Critical Anthology of Science Fiction, edited by Leslie A. Fiedler (New York, 1975), 233-239.
- Anthony Burgess, A Clockwork Orange (New York, 1962).
- Walter Van Tilburg Clark, "The Portable Phonograph," in Another Tomorrow: A Science Fiction Anthology, edited by Bernard C. Hollister (Dayton, Ohio, 1974), 95-102.
- Harlan Ellison, "'Repent, Harlequin!' Said the Ticktockman," in Above the Human Landscape: An Anthology of Social Science Fiction, edited by Willis E. McNelly and Leon E. Stover (Pacific Palisades, California, 1972), 87-96.
- Harry Harrison, Make Room! Make Room! (New York, 1966).

Aldous Huxley, Brave New World (New York, 1946).

C. M. Kornbluth, "The Marching Morons," in Modern Science Fiction, edited by Norman Spinrad (Garden City, New York, 1974), 194-227.

George Orwell, 1984 (New York, 1949).

Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth, The Space Merchants (New York, 1953).

Joanna Russ, "When It Changed," in Again, Dangerous Visions, vol. I, edited by Harlan Ellison (New York, 1972), 271-279.

Michael Shaara, "2066: Election Day," in Political Science Fiction: An Introductory Reader, edited by Martin Harry Greenberg and Patricia S. Warrick (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1974), 218-230.

"2024 A.D.: A Probe Into the Future," Saturday Review/World, I (August 24, 1974), 6-131.

#### Conclusion

The undergraduate history classroom should be a no-holds-barred arena for intellectual challenge. Since most students in survey history courses see little value in memorizing the theories of Henri Pirenne, Arnold J. Toynbee, or Isaiah Berlin, history teachers ought to compel these students to develop respect for a logical method of examining social issues. Here the ideas of John Dewey form the philosophical bridge between the teaching/learning function and the goal of historical instruction in general education. Throughout his brilliant career Dewey argued that the reflective method of teaching was the only legitimate approach to permit individuals to identify, explore, and resolve problems of social concern. Realistically, Dewey's approach offered students more questions than answers.<sup>3</sup> Whether teachers choose to use "folk history," "alternative history," or "future history," the true objective of examining the past is to permit man to gain insight into himself. This Socratic goal should guide teachers as they select classroom resources for historical instruction.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Nora D. Christianson, "Teaching American History Through Its Period Music," Social Studies, XL (April 1949), 156-165; John Kimball, "Music and the Teaching of American History," Social Education, XXVII (January 1963), 23-25; John E. DiMeglio, "Music in World History Classes," The History Teacher, IV (January 1971), 54-56; Harry Dhand, "Musical Reflections on Canada's History," Social Education, XXXV (October 1971), 624-627; B. Lee Cooper and Larry S. Haverkos, "Using Popular Music in Social Studies Instruction," Audiovisual Instruction, XVII (November 1972), 86-88; and B. Lee Cooper, "Examining Social Change Through Contemporary History: An Audio Media Proposal," The History Teacher VI (August 1973), 523-534.

<sup>2</sup>Richard Rosenstone, "'The Times They are A-Changing': The Music of Protest," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, CCCLXXI (March 1969), 131-144; and Harris Friedberg, "Bob Dylan: Psycho-historian of a Generation," The Chronicle of Higher Education, VIII (January 18, 1974), 15-16.

<sup>3</sup>See three major works by John Dewey: Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education (New York, 1916), 152-193; How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process (Boston, 1933), 3-190; and The Quest for Certainty: A Study of The Relation of Knowledge and Action (New York, 1929), 3-25 and 223-313.