

INTRODUCTION TO A SPECIAL SECTION OF *TEACHING HISTORY*

Teaching History: A Journal of Methods was first published in 1976. The purpose of the journal has been to provide history teachers at all levels with the best and most relevant ideas for their classrooms. In recognition of the journal's recent 40th anniversary and Larry Cuban's timely book *Teaching History Then and Now: A Story of Stability and Change in Schools* (2016), we created a special section for the Fall 2017 and Spring 2018 issues of the journal.

In this Fall 2017 issue of *Teaching History*, Richard Hughes first offers a review of Cuban's book. Next, Hughes provides an analysis of the early years of the journal, focusing on the journal's founding in the context of teaching movements in the 1970s. Finally, we asked history educators across the K-16 continuum to draw upon their personal experiences and assess the evolution of history teaching. Specifically, we asked: To what extent has the teaching of history changed or remained the same in your career?

In this issue, we have synthesized the contributions of individuals who focused on teaching history largely in the context of secondary schools. Our Spring 2018 issue will feature commentary that pertains to teaching history with an emphasis on the college and university context.

—SDB

SPECIAL SECTION BOOK REVIEW

Richard L. Hughes

Larry Cuban. *Teaching History Then and Now: A Story of Stability and Change in Schools.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2016. Pp. 264. Cloth, \$64.00.

In October 1957, Larry Cuban was in his second year teaching history at Glenville High, a predominantly African American school in Cleveland, Ohio. That same month, the Soviet Union launched *Sputnik*. The success of the first artificial earth satellite fueled a great deal of anxiety about the state of American education, leading to the 1958 National Defense Education Act and increased calls for reform in history education in the subsequent decade. In December 1957, as *Sputnik* continued orbiting the earth, William Langer, the president of the American Historical Association (AHA), dedicated his annual address to "The Next Assignment," or what he referred to as the innovative "directions which historical study might profitably take in the years to

come.”¹ Langer’s address heralded the potential of psychology to inform the work of historians while providing few hints as to the revolutionary changes facing the discipline and education beginning in the sixties.

This sense of impending change in the discipline of history, both in terms of scholarship and teaching, lies at the center of Cuban’s recent book, *Teaching History Then and Now: A Story of Stability and Change in Schools*. Cuban taught history in urban high schools in Cleveland and Washington, D.C. from 1956 to 1967 and, after an illustrious career as a scholar of education at Stanford University, recently returned to his two former schools to assess the evolution of teaching history since the fifties. Starting with detailed accounts of classroom instruction in the years after 1956, Cuban draws upon interviews and classroom observations at both of his former schools to compare history education in the late 1950s and early 1960s to teaching history in 2013. Cuban emphasizes the persistent paradox at the heart of much of history education: the dual role of preserving a particular sense of the past while also preparing the next generation to change the future. Cuban utilizes this paradox to portray history education, and indeed American public education in general, as encompassing both change and continuity as schools resist changes to the teaching and learning of history while “embracing innovations” ranging from the New History of the late 1960s, which focused on student inquiry, to the *Common Core* standards of recent years (164). The results, according to Cuban, are history classrooms in Cleveland, Washington, D.C., and throughout the nation today that mostly resemble the “teacher-centered tradition” or “heritage approach” of the 1950s with a focus on textbooks, lectures, discussions, and exams centered on learning and recalling a set of important historical facts (179, 1). At the same time, however, Cuban concludes that the “incomplete mosaic of history instruction” also suggests that a significant minority of American history teachers have embraced what he refers to as the “historical approach” or the *New New History* focused on the frequent analysis of primary sources to teach students how historians read, think, and write about the past (175,1).

While much of *Teaching History Then and Now* focuses on the limits of the sort of larger educational policy issues that have interested Cuban for decades, his description of schools as “dynamically conservative organizations” provides a launching point for reassessing the state of history education in both secondary and higher education (181). Cuban’s career as a teacher and scholar spanned many of the seismic social, political, economic, and technological developments of the postwar period. Emphasizing the uneasy coexistence of change and continuity in history education, Cuban’s book is ultimately more intrigued with the powerful forces of continuity. He argues that efforts to reform history education on the secondary level have largely underestimated structural issues such as the organization of American

¹<https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/presidential-addresses/william-l-langer>

schools or broad socioeconomic factors as well as, perhaps most importantly, the pivotal role of classroom instructors in embracing or limiting instructional and curriculum changes in history education. While his analysis of secondary history teaching is admittedly limited, Cuban's book is highly relevant to all history teachers. Issues such as teacher education, Advanced Placement courses, federal Teaching American History grants, and the preparation of future undergraduates as well as citizens in a society in which history education is increasingly politicized underscore the inevitable links between the teaching of history in secondary schools and in higher education.

***Teaching History Then: The Origins of the Journal and
The History Teaching Movement of the 1970s***

Richard L. Hughes

One way to explore changes and continuities in history education in the last forty years, especially in higher education, is to examine the evolution of *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods*. *Teaching History* grew out of conversations at the Missouri Valley History conference in 1974 and 1975. With support from Emporia Kansas State College as well as the interest of college and university faculty, secondary teachers, and public historians, Stephen Kneeshaw (editor) and Ron Butchart (book review editor) published the inaugural issue in the Spring of 1976. The journal aimed to address the following topics: "Teaching technology and techniques; trends in textbooks; trends in historical scholarship; philosophical essays on the teaching of history; curricula; and reports on innovative experiments."¹ The goal was that the journal would "provide history teachers with another outlet for the presentation and discussion of innovative techniques and teaching methods."²

It is tempting to think of the mid-seventies as a promising time for the discipline of history in American society. The U.S. Bicentennial brought countless efforts to reflect on our nation's past, and Alex Haley's *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (1976), which spent almost a year on *The New York Times* Bestseller List in 1976-77,

¹Stephen John Kneeshaw, "History of Teaching History," *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods* 1 (1976): 1.

²Ibid.