

So where do we go from here? I have two suggestions. First, I think we need to know much more about the way history has been taught in the past. Scholars might build upon the work of the late Hazel Hertzberg whose essay on a "Century of Reform" proposals dating back to 1892 puts the report of the Bradley Commission into historical perspective. Though Hertzberg has detailed here and elsewhere the concerns of earlier generations of scholars and commissioners about the role of history in the schools, we need to know more about the way the *actual* teaching of history has been influenced by the earlier commissions.

Thus far the research in this area is abysmal. Neo-conservatives such as William Bennett, Lynne Cheney, and Chester Finn have set up an idealistic past against which they measure the current geographic and historical ignorance of today's students. Particularly fallible in this regard is Diane Ravitch's essay on "The Plight of History in American Schools." Skirting criticisms of her research about the "erosion of historical understanding among Americans," Ravitch argues "whether their counterparts in the past knew less, is beside the point." With friends like this on the Bradley Commission, who needs enemies?

My second suggestion is that we form a successor to the Bradley Commission whose major task would be to develop a model core curriculum in world, European, and American history encompassing grades K through graduate school. The panels should be composed of college, high school, and grammar school teachers of history who would work only with those university professors who are committed to teaching. For example, Gary B. Nash, an excellent scholar as well as teacher, might establish several of these panels under his mission as associate director of the UCLA/NEH National Center for History in the Schools. The new commission's primary task should be to synthesize the old and new histories with specific lessons and materials including texts in every area and for all grade levels. Perhaps a new *Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* could be devised that would avoid the obvious elitist biases of some of the more recent works.

I know this suggestion sounds utopian and unrealistic, but until we develop some type of consensus on what we should be teaching in the classroom, our seventeen-year olds in the year 2020 will be as confused about the past as they are in 1990.

Howard Community College

Larry Madaras

Richard Marius. *A Short Guide to Writing About History*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman & Company, 1989. Pp. xv, 261. Paper, \$7.95.

Anthony Brundage. *Going to the Sources: A Guide to Historical Research and Writing*. Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1989. Pp. x, 79. Paper, \$5.95.

Overheard in the hallway outside of 201 Murkland -

Susan: "I heard we would have to do a lot of writing in this course but an essay, a book review and a paper! The prof either has a lot of time on her hands or she hates her grad assistant."

Sam: "Yes, Susan, you are going to have to work for a change. But, Dr. Wright did tell us about a couple of very useful books on historical research and writing. Let's head to the bookstore and check them out."

Would that we all had more Sams than Susans in our classes but we can at least hope that Susan follows Sam's advice and does "check out" these books. As Richard Marius writes in his preface,

In most history courses, students are required to write papers to demonstrate both a command of the facts and the ability to think about them. They are seldom given any formal instruction in how to do the special kind of writing that the study of history demands. They are expected to pick up this skill almost by osmosis. For years history teachers have ritually complained that their students do not write well. Only recently have

we begun to understand that helping our students write acceptably about history is part of our responsibility in teaching them the discipline itself.

Both of these books are useful aids for the serious writer of history and well worth the consideration of everyone from high school A.P. teachers to those professors who specialize in graduate courses.

Writing about History is part of the short guide series that includes titles on literature, film, and social sciences. The book deals with a variety of historical writing, including essays, research papers, and book reviews. There are also two good chapters on asking the journalistic questions (e.g., who, what, where . . .) and on modes of historical writing (description, narrative, exposition, and argument). Short chapters on documentation, style and conventional usage, and a sample research paper are also included. The book is generally well written, with a lucid style and a minimum of jargon. Highlighted section headings help students focus quickly on the area they need to deal with. There are also many examples of writing in most chapters and sections.

Major strengths of Marius's book include these examples. In the chapter on "The Essay In History," he includes excerpts from several student essays to illustrate his points and this technique is carried on throughout the book, especially in the chapters on journalistic questions and modes of historical writing. The sample research paper is also very complete, with excellent editorial comments as to both form and content.

One other important hint in this book is the suggestion that students start their research in the reference room, not at the card catalog. This occupies only three pages of the book but is an aspect of writing that most students overlook. The idea of using encyclopedias for general background on a topic and then progressing to specialized bibliographies is extremely important and can often save time and make for a much stronger final product.

While the use of examples is for the most part a strength, there is one notable exception. In the section on plagiarism in writing essays, there are the usual strictures but no examples. I believe that students are often unclear about the boundaries of acceptable practice in this area, and one or two pages of examples would have been extremely helpful. There are also a few minor factual errors in the book, such as that France started building the Maginot Line in 1940 and that one hundred million people died in Europe during the Black Death, but these should not detract substantially from the book's value.

A Short Guide to Writing about History is not all-encompassing but is a very comprehensive research tool. It is, however, for the committed student. The average college writer may indeed be intimidated by the excellence of some of the examples, and many undergraduates would not spend the time to absorb the depth of available information.

In *Going to the Sources*, Anthony Brundage covers much of the same ground as Richard Marius but in a briefer format, with attendant advantages and disadvantages. Brundage begins with a short historical review of the writing of history and proceeds to a discussion of sources, documentation, and the writing of the research paper. He also includes an important chapter on the writing of historiographical essays.

Practical advice is the major strength of *Going to the Sources*. There are many examples, from the concept of "shelf browsing" to the point about alternating the types of sources being worked on to reduce boredom and allow for cross-fertilization among books and ideas. There is also explication of often under-utilized sources, such as collections of historical abstracts and the increasingly available computer search capabilities of college and university libraries. Brundage is not afraid to present forceful opinions. In reference to Eric Goldman's *The Crucial Decade*, he writes, "Criticisms of this type of approach as being too 'popular' or 'journalistic' are sometimes heard. In response, it might be said that among the various possible reactions to reading Goldman's introductory paragraphs, closing the book seems the least likely." This type of entry enables students to feel a real person behind the advice and should make them more willing to take the valuable suggestions contained therein.

While one objective in writing this guide was clearly brevity, I feel that five to ten additional pages over two areas would not have violated that goal and would have added greatly to the final result. The opening brief review of the stages of historical writing is unique and useful—it would have been made more valuable by including more extended examples of each style. In addition, the

explanations of the problems of using as sources "the writings of ordinary people" could be greatly enhanced with examples. Although these minor flaws are regrettable, Professor Brundage has written a clear, concise guide to historical writing, one that should be useful to many college students.

It is clear that the authors of these two books care deeply about student writing and very likely expend enormous time and effort in their own courses in helping students improve. *Writing about History* is the more comprehensive, with explanations of a wider range of writing and many more examples. While in general less detailed, *Going to the Sources* does include two unique chapters and much practical advice. The Marius book is probably more suited to upper-level and graduate students, while Brundage is more "available" to the average history student. However, the historiographical essay chapter in Brundage would also be helpful at the graduate level. Professors who are committed to improving student writing should review both of these books and select the one that most closely fits the type of writing assignments they prefer and that best meets the needs of their particular students.

Lebanon High School
Lebanon, New Hampshire

Arthur Pease

Paul K. Conkin and Roland N. Stromberg. *Heritage and Challenge: The History and Theory of History*. Arlington Heights, IL: Forum Press, Inc., 1989. Pp. xi, 260. Paper, \$12.95.

Gertrude Himmelfarb. *The New History and the Old*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989. Pp. 209. Paper, \$8.95.

Heritage and Challenge, first published in 1971 and now revised, is intended for use as a textbook and is really two books in one. The first half, by Stromberg, is a history of history, while the second half, by Conkin, is an examination of the philosophy of history; only the chapter on "Recent Trends" and the brief epilogue are collaborative efforts.

Stromberg's six chapters on historians from ancient times to about 1960 are an analytical critique rather than a mere summary. His basic argument is that modern historical consciousness, which he defines as the ability to understand change, did not begin to emerge until the Enlightenment, and reached its full flower only in the nineteenth century—the "Golden Age" of history.

Historicism, whatever we may think of it today, gave history in the nineteenth century an influence it has never achieved since. Stromberg even suggests that this golden age of history was not merely a result of the French and industrial revolutions, but because of its emphasis on change, was a primary factor in molding nineteenth-century society. Perhaps so, but Stromberg gives no real indication that the relativism of historicism may have led directly to the historical skepticism that followed in the twentieth century—the new historicism, as he calls it, that, unlike the historicism of the previous century, argues that history has no meaning. For Stromberg, the question is whether history can withstand this loss of meaning.

The answer to both authors in their chapter on "Recent Trends" is that indeed history can. But their discussion may leave the reader skeptical, for except in one or two instances, such as the emphasis on gender (both authors make a bow in this direction by usually referring to the historian in the general sense as "she"), they proceed to deplore both the emphasis and methods of the New History.

Conkin, if we may judge by his half of the book, can best be classified as a member of the Walsh-Dray-Hexter school that argues that history is essentially a narrative—a story—written in ordinary language, which, while it makes some claim to truth, depends more on selectivity and coherence than upon some complete explanation of reality. Conkin's main point, reiterated throughout, is that history deals with cultural rather than physical phenomena; it is the product of human thought and actions and is therefore, though not completely, non-deterministic, non-generalizing, and certainly non-predictive.