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About the Journal

Founded in 1975 by Stephen Kneeshaw, Loren Pennington, and Philip Reed Rulon and first published in 1976, *Teaching History*'s purpose has been to provide teachers at all levels with the best and newest ideas for their classrooms. The journal is published twice yearly, in the spring and in the fall, and receives financial support from Ball State University and Emporia State University.

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Articles

Book Reviews

From the Editor

Sarah Drake Brown
Ball State University

Since its founding in 1976, *Teaching History* has promoted scholarly history teaching and has sought to contribute to the concept of signature pedagogies in the discipline. This issue continues that tradition by including four essays that bring attention to the need for history teachers at all levels to consider how they might help students use history's habits of mind to pursue deep historical thinking.

Benjamin Leff, a history teacher at University High School in Urbana, Illinois, leads this issue by discussing how he engages his students in thinking about historiography. Importantly, Leff offers specific examples of his students' work, and he considers the extent to which students' experiences in his history class had a lasting impact on their thinking in the discipline.

Historians Richard Hughes, Peter Burkholder, and Natalie Mendoza then offer their perspectives on the importance of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) and the role that SoTL research plays in their work as historians. Their essays draw specifically from the workshop they led at the American Historical Association's 2019 annual meeting in Chicago. First, Hughes describes historians' relatively recent emphasis on articulating the discipline-specific thinking promoted through historical study. He provides an overview of growing efforts by historians to engage in History SoTL research and argues that this research affords historians the opportunity to reflect on the state of the discipline and consider how data pertaining to student learning might contribute to the health of the major.

Peter Burkholder then provides a specific outline of the potentials of SoTL research, focusing on the process of decoding student bottlenecks and building into one's classes opportunities

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for deliberate practice pertaining to textual analysis. Burkholder walks readers through the SoTL process as it pertains to history, providing a specific example of the method and results that the AHA now actively encourages.

Hughes and Mendoza's essay situates historians' work in SoTL in the contentious assessment arena. Drawing on Mendoza's work at the University of Colorado Boulder as the leader of the History Teaching and Learning Project, they call for an emphasis on assessment of and for learning, and they bring attention to the potential that meaningful and purposeful assessment has for students and for historians.

Taken as a whole, this issue of *Teaching History* emphasizes the important role played by SoTL research at the high school and university levels and focuses on using data to promote scholarly teaching. The authors emphasize the legitimacy of SoTL work as research, and their essays call attention to the importance of conversations among all history educators, K-16, as we work to develop signature pedagogies that encompass the structure, tools of inquiry, and central concepts of the discipline.

The second issue of the forty-fourth volume calls attention to *Teaching History's* consistent effort to promote scholarly history teaching, and it also serves as a bookend to one aspect of the journal: Volume 44 marks the final paper publication of *Teaching History*. Beginning with Volume 45, *Teaching History* will move to a completely online format. Our goal as scholars must always be to share the methods and results of our research with the broadest and most diverse audience possible, and by providing open-access to individuals and groups through Open Journal Systems (https://openjournals.bsu.edu/teachinghistory), we can more effectively reach historians, secondary teachers, and the wider public.

Two individuals who have played key roles in the history of *Teaching History* and who have been vital to the journal's success and its publication in hard copy are Christopher Lovett, Professor of History at Emporia State University, and Jacqueline

Fehr, Administrative Assistant at Emporia State University. As the journal's publication director and administrative assistant, respectively, Chris and Jacque have guided all aspects of *Teaching History's* publication process. I would be remiss if I did not state publicly that while the decision to move the journal to an online publication can be justified by the opportunities allowed through open access, a key factor in my decision rested on the upcoming retirement of Chris and Jacque from their roles in producing the journal. Chris has served as publication director since 2002, and Jacque has been with the journal since 1976! In many ways, they *are* the journal. I take this opportunity to recognize them publicly for their professionalism, their dedication to our work, and their warmth as they strove to make *Teaching History* a publication worthy of our readers. Chris and Jacque, thank you for your devotion to *Teaching History*, your kindness, and the guidance you have provided me over the past four years. On behalf of the editorial and advisory boards and our readers, I wish you well!

Sarah Drake Brown
Editor, *Teaching History*

"BUT WHICH ONE IS RIGHT?": USING COMPETING INTERPRETATIONS OF EASTER ISLAND TO TEACH HISTORIOGRAPHICAL THINKING

Benjamin J.J. Leff

University Laboratory High School, Urbana, Illinois

There is a moment in a documentary about Easter Island that always makes me smile, but it flummoxes many of my students. The documentary, called *Easter Island in Context: From Paradise to Calamity*, features numerous interviews with archaeologists who have researched the history of society on Rapa Nui (the name used for Easter Island by its indigenous inhabitants).[1] The relevant moment in the film concerns a historical puzzle regarding the giant stone heads for which the historically isolated Pacific island is so famous: How did the inhabitants of Rapa Nui transport these enormous multi-ton statues to platforms that are often miles away from the quarry from which the stone was extracted? Archaeologist Paul Bahn hypothesizes that the Rapanui "may have moved some, or certainly a few of the statues, by water." At this point in the film, the students dutifully start writing down this explanation in their notes, but halfway through their sentence they are interrupted by a different interview with an archaeologist named Georgia Lee, who contends, "I don't think they floated anything around the island. Give me a break." The film then continues to cut back and forth between the interviews of two scholars:

> Bahn: It takes all the weight away from the object you're trying to move. Most of the platforms are around the coast.

1 In this article, I will generally follow scholarly convention by referring to Easter Island as Rapa Nui, and to the indigenous inhabitants of the island as the "Rapanui."

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Lee: The coastline is really jagged, and rugged, and rocks, and lava.
Bahn: They had a big canoe ramp well-built down to the ocean, have a large raft waiting there, and then simply float it around to the canoe ramp nearest your platform.
Lee: I think it would be far more trouble, particularly if you don't have a lot of wood. What are you going to float them on? Come on. Nah, I don't think so.[2]

By this point, some students are laughing, but other students are clearly exasperated. Some even look at me plaintively and hopefully, a seeming nonverbal request for official adjudication of the dispute. Both archaeologists are experts, so which one is right? When I pause the video a few minutes later, I say something like: "I love that moment when the two archaeologists are arguing. Why does that moment make me so happy as a history teacher?" Sure enough, a few intrepid students are able to successfully read my mind, replying (in so many words) that this demonstrates the challenges of uncovering "what really happened" in the past, and that historical inquiry is often defined by debate between competing interpretations of the past rather than uncontroversial consensus.

Why Teach Historiographical Debate?

This anecdote illuminates a subject that is commonly discussed in history education circles. Historian Lendol Calder has argued for the importance of developing a "signature pedagogy" in history courses, in which students learn not only historical content but also how to think like a historian. In Calder's words, history teachers should try to inculcate the "values, knowledge and manner of thinking" that define the historical discipline rather than merely attempt to cram historical information into

2 *Easter Island in Context: From Paradise to Calamity,* directed by Peter A. Steen. (2002, West Hollywood, CA: Adler Media). Accessed June 4, 2018. http://fod.infobase.com/p_ViewPlaylist.aspx?AssignmentID=ZMNTZJ

their students' heads.[3] If our goal as history instructors is indeed to help students learn how to "do" history as practitioners do it, then surely we must expose them to the study of historiography. Any history graduate student would attest that a substantial part of their training involves learning about debates between historians regarding proper interpretation of certain historical topics, as well as studying continuity and change regarding which interpretations and modes of inquiry have prevailed over time.

However, it is probably fair to speculate that many high school and college history classrooms give scant attention to historiography. The classic history textbook is written in what history education scholar Sam Wineburg calls the "omniscient third person," thus eliminating "metadiscourse…the places in the text where the author intrudes to indicate positionality and stance."[4] In this way, the contested nature of history is hidden from the student. Similarly, the teacher in a traditional history classroom is assumed to have similar "omniscient" qualities, serving as the student's ultimate authority by offering *the* definitive interpretation of history. The paradigm of the test, premised on the idea that students will be rewarded for providing the "right answers," reinforces the idea that students are supposed to be learning a particular "correct" interpretation of the past. Thus, the entire mode of traditional historical instruction serves to obscure historical debate and interpretative contestation—highly ironic given how central these activities are to the professional lives of academic historians. Thus, if we aim to develop a signature pedagogy for the history classroom—if we truly wish to teach students how to think like historians rather than merely convey "what happened" in the past—we must not just teach historical thinking, but what scholars Thomas Fallace and Johann Neem

3 Lendol Calder, "Uncoverage: Towards a Signature Pedagogy for the History Survey," *Journal of American History* 92, no. 4 (2006): 1361.
4 Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 12-13.

have called "historiographical thinking."[5]

At the most basic level, "historiographical thinking" is built on the premise that "history" is not a self-evident rendering of the past; instead, there is an array of historical interpretations that exist at any given moment. At one level, professional historians think historiographically by relating any new information to their knowledge of what other scholars have already written on a given topic. Of course, students in a survey course can never be expected to be familiar with the existing literature on the subjects they encounter in class, but they can start to think historiographically in two ways. First, they can learn to relate a historical interpretation to the social and historical context in which it was written. For example, on one of my assignments, I provide an account of Reconstruction written in 1901 by historian (and future President) Woodrow Wilson, and I ask students to explain how his interpretation is typical of the racial attitudes that prevailed during the Jim Crow era.[6] Second, students can learn that at any given moment, there are multiple interpretations of

5 Thomas Fallace & Johann Neem, "Historiographical Thinking: Towards a New Approach to Preparing History Teachers," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 33, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 329-346.

6 See Woodrow Wilson, "The Reconstruction of the Southern States," *Atlantic Monthly* (January 1901) at https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1901/01/the-reconstruction-of-the-southern-states/520035/ Indeed, Reconstruction provides an excellent opportunity for teaching historiographically. Early twentieth-century American historians portrayed Reconstruction as a tragic mistake, in which the South was misgoverned because African-Americans were supposedly "incapable of responsibly exercising the political power that had been thrust upon them." This interpretation was turned entirely on its head in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement. Post-1960s historians portrayed black suffrage as a noble step towards racial equality; the "misgovernment" of the South came when so-called Redeemers installed an exploitative regime of racial segregation and disenfranchisement. Thus, a student who is thinking historiographically would recognize that each historical interpretation aligns with the racial ideology that prevailed in that time period. For the quote above and a more robust (yet concise) summary of these historiographical trends, see Eric Foner, "Slavery, Civil War, and Reconstruction," in *The New American History*, ed. Eric Foner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 96-103.

the past—sometimes complementary, but sometimes competing. Teachers can help students hone historiographical thinking skills by confronting them with pairs of secondary sources discussing the same topic and having them evaluate each argument and determine which explanation is more compelling. Thus, while students in an introductory survey could never be expected to master the historiography on a given subject, they can learn to analyze history as a set of (potentially competing) interpretations of the past.

However, certain intelligent and reasonable people might believe that teaching discipline-specific historical thinking skills is misguided. To channel this hypothetical perspective: Very few high school students will end up being professional historians, so why teach them how to think like historians? Instead, the teacher should stay focused on teaching what happened in the past rather than waste energy teaching modes of inquiry that are only relevant to professional practitioners. To the extent that we should teach students "thinking" skills, they should be generic analytical skills that could be applied in any context. I do not hold this view, and I do not imagine that anyone reading a history education journal does either. Nevertheless, even if one concedes the point and agrees that history teachers should be teaching generic skills, there is *still* a compelling argument that students benefit from an approach that views history as an arena for competing interpretations. This is because even though few high school history students will become professional historians, nearly all will become citizens (or at least, participants in a civic culture). And in that respect, it is invaluable that students gain experience encountering competing interpretations of "truth," identifying key points of agreement and disagreement between those interpretations, and assessing which interpretations are most compelling.

Honing these skills is especially crucial given the nature of the "information ecosystem" that today's students inhabit.[7]

7 Much ink has been spilled on this subject, but this term is drawn from a thoughtful

When presented with a question about history or politics or society, we have all learned the quick way to arrive at an answer: Google it. Indeed, we should be deeply grateful for the amount of information that is readily available at our fingertips. However, for most important topics, discovering "what happened" is not so simple—and deeper questions like "how?" and "why?" are even harder to definitively answer. This is because the proliferation of accessible information doesn't necessarily lead to clarity—it can in fact obscure it by multiplying the number of available interpretations. Furthermore, the information ecosystem is rife with pitfalls, as misinformation and bias compromise the reliability of the easily accessible data on the internet. Additionally, as consumers, we bring our own preconceptions and a proclivity towards confirmation bias, defined by Alan Miller as the tendency of people "to seek confirmation of their existing beliefs, rather than information that might contradict or complicate them."[8] Given that students inhabit this exciting but treacherous informational terrain, teaching historical thinking is a valuable means to enhance what is becoming an ever more important information literacy skill: assessing the reliability of information by deconstructing arguments and deducing the potential biases of an author.[9] This skill, such an essential component of historical thinking, is also important when seeking to understand contemporary social and political debates, whether one is weighing competing arguments for differing immigration policies or seeking to understand different explanations of the roots of the gender wage gap. It may be impossible in many of these situations to definitively decide

2016 article: Alan C. Miller, "Confronting Confirmation Bias: Giving Truth a Chance in the Information Age," *Social Education* 80, no. 5 (October 2016): 276.

8 Ibid., 277.

9 To be sure, I do not mean to imply that only with the rise of the internet did students need to learn to assess the reliability of a source or an author's bias. However, it is also fair to say that the internet has produced an increasingly fragmented mediascape and the collapse of various barriers to publication. In such an environment, learning to critically approach and assess the quality of information has become increasingly important.

which interpretation is right, but students will surely benefit from getting practice judging which arguments are more compelling and exploring how competing interpretations might be reconciled.

An Opportunity for Teaching Historiographical Debate: What Happened to Rapa Nui?

To help my students develop these skills, I teach a multi-day lesson on Rapa Nui, the island I discussed at the outset of this article. The "mystery" of Rapa Nui is often portrayed thusly: By the end of the nineteenth century, the society of Rapa Nui had collapsed. Once home to thousands of inhabitants, the island's population dwindled to hundreds if not dozens, the forests had been destroyed, and numerous plant and animal species had gone extinct. What happened? Without decipherable written records that precede European arrival, scholars have to rely primarily on the interpretation of physical evidence to answer that question.[10] As part of my lesson, students read and compare two scholars' competing interpretations of that evidence to explain the fate of Rapa Nui. The traditional view is articulated by geographer and popular scholar Jared Diamond, who argues that the Rapanui experienced swift population growth and eventually exhausted their island's resources, triggering societal collapse. The revisionist view is articulated by archaeologist Terry Hunt, who argues that the archaeological record isn't consistent with human-induced societal collapse.[11]

In addition to having students engage with a very interesting historical question—what really happened to the Rapanui?—this lesson helps students hone their historical and historiographical thinking skills. First, it requires students to unpack arguments.

10 The Rapa Nui actually did have a script called Rongorongo, but it has yet to be deciphered.

11 Jared Diamond, "Easter's End," *Discover* 16, no. 8 (August 1995): 63-69 and Terry Hunt, "Rethinking the Fall of Easter Island," *American Scientist* 94 (January 2006): 412-419. A more robust description of the two arguments will be provided in the next section of the article.

Both Diamond and Hunt deploy evidence that leads to distinct interpretative claims, and they ultimately arrive at different conclusions about the history of Rapa Nui. This lesson gives students good practice identifying these components of historical arguments. Second, students get practice evaluating arguments. Students will ultimately weigh the interpretations of the two scholars, and in the process, determine what features of an argument make it compelling or suspect.

Finally, this activity underscores two meta-points about history referenced earlier in the essay. First, *there is rarely one unquestioned view of a historical event or process*. Scholars are nearly always debating—which is both frustrating and exciting. Second, *scholars' arguments can be driven by external agendas*. Students will discover that Diamond is using the Rapa Nui "ecocide" as a cautionary tale about human-induced environmental destruction; such an agenda may lead students to distrust his analysis. Similarly, Hunt could have his own motivations for "taking down" Jared Diamond that are separate from the noble pursuit of the truth. Thus, this lesson provides students an opportunity to hone skills that are vital to historiographical thinking as well as more broadly applicable critical thinking skills in today's digital information landscape.

In the coming paragraphs, I will explain the procedure for this multi-day lesson in some detail, but I will first situate it within my broader curriculum. This lesson was taught as part of a World History course taught to freshmen at University Laboratory High School, a selective-admission public laboratory school in Urbana, Illinois. However, the subject matter is sufficiently complex that it could easily be taught to older high school and college students.[12] The lesson was part of a one-week "mini-unit" on

12 This was not an AP World History course, as our school does not offer AP courses (instead, all classes are considered to be "honors" classes since our school explicitly serves "academically talented" students). The course was global in geographic scope, but technically limited chronologically to the period between 2000 BCE and 1500 CE, as it is followed by a Modern History course that students take as sophomores. Thus,

Austronesian society, and as such, was preceded by a background lesson about the Austronesian people who first settled hundreds of Pacific islands centuries before Europeans arrived.[13] Then I focus more specifically on the Austronesian inhabitants of Rapa Nui, discussing some features of their society, including the *moai* statues that have achieved worldwide fame. The giant stone statues are more than an intriguing curiosity, but instead offer compelling evidence about the structure of Rapa Nui society. The historian can infer much from their giant size (a typical statue weighs over ten tons, and some weigh much more) and the significant distance between the quarry from which the stone was extracted and their mounting site. The substantial effort required to construct and transport these statues requires a level of collective endeavor that implies some degree of social hierarchy and complex organization. The placement of collections of *moai* statues on different *ahus* (platforms) throughout the island indicates the presence of sociopolitical divisions—different clans (called *mata*) each with their own ceremonial center. According to Rapanui oral tradition, the statues were believed to hold the *mana*, or spiritual "energy," of particular ancestors who continued to watch over their *mata* after death. In sum, the cult of the *moai* tells a story about Rapa Nui social structure and culture.

One other detail about the *moai* points to the real focus of my

as you will see, I was slightly "cheating" in this lesson by discussing developments that occurred after 1500, outside the chronological barriers of my class.

13 To provide slightly more detail: I start the unit by laying out the "mystery" of the Austronesians. Simply put, when and how did these people manage to settle these islands across thousands of miles of ocean water? I then briefly discuss evidence from botany and oral tradition, but spend the most time doing an activity based on linguistic evidence. I give students information about the common "Austronesian" language family and have them map the Pacific migration based on that evidence. After this activity, I explain the prevailing theory about how the Austronesian people migrated, the culture of the Austronesian peoples, and what kind of societies they set up in the Pacific islands. At this point, students are ready to understand the development of society on Rapa Nui as part of the broader context of Austronesian migration. If you are interested in how I teach any of this material, I am happy to correspond via email at leff@illinois.edu.

lesson: Many of them were destroyed by the Rapanui themselves. By the time Europeans arrived, many had been toppled, and some were even deliberately pushed down onto stones such that the *moai* were decapitated. In some cases, the eyes—which were believed to hold the statue's *mana*—were deliberately crushed. This strongly indicates some kind of warfare on the island, likely between the different *mata*. Around the same time as the *moai* were being desecrated, there was a significant population drop on the island. This speaks to the tantalizing question at the heart of my lesson: What happened on Rapa Nui that led a flourishing society to descend into chaos? [14]

14 Most of the information in the preceding paragraphs can be found in Steen, *Easter Island in Context.* This valuable documentary features interpretations and analysis from a number of scholars who study society on Rapa Nui. Additional information is drawn from Diamond, "Easter's End," and Hunt, "Rethinking the Fall of Easter Island."

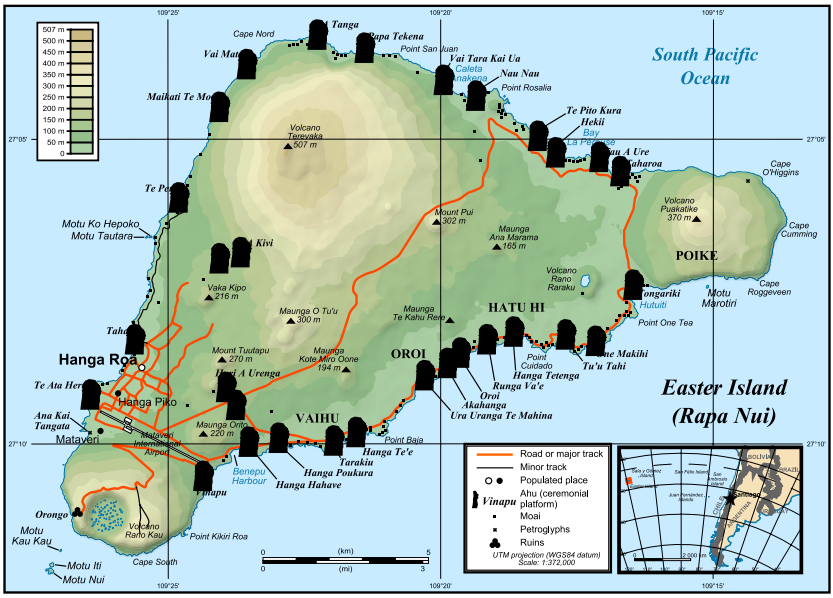

Figure 1: This map shows that all of the stone for the massive moai had to be transported significant distances from the quarry at Rano Raraku (towards the east of the island) to the various ahu (platform) sites. Scholars have concluded that completing such a formidable project would have required complex social organization. Additionally, the fact that ahu (platforms) are spread throughout the island supports the interpretation that Rapa Nui was socio-politically divided among numerous mata (clans).[15]

15 Eric Gaba, Easter_Island_map-en.svg, Digital Image, Wikimedia Commons, December 10, 2011, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Easter_Island_map-en.svg.

Figure 2: This image shows a collection of *moai* at Ahu Tongariki. These statues are massive: They range between 18 and 28 feet tall, and one weighs over eighty tons.[16]

Pre-Work: Competing Arguments Regarding the "Fall" of Easter Island

In preparation for this lesson, I provide students with truncated versions of two articles to read for homework. The first is "Easter's End" by Jared Diamond, published in *Discover Magazine* in 1995 (though he also reworked and expanded these ideas in a chapter of his 2005 book, *Collapse*). Diamond argues that Rapa Nui presents a tragic example of human-induced environmental catastrophe. The first humans to arrive on the island encountered a "miniature paradise" with fertile soil and abundant resources. For a time,

16 Bjørn Christian Tørrissen, Ahu-Tongariki-from-south-west-2013.jpg, Digital Image, Wikimedia Commons, May 8, 2014, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ahu-Tongariki-from-south-west-2013.jpg.

society flourished. A population of at least 7,000 (and perhaps as high as 20,000) developed "complex political organization" to extract, transport, and redistribute the goods scattered across the island. But the trappings of this successful society disappear from the archaeological record during the middle of the second millennium CE. The forests were decimated, myriad animal species were driven to extinction, and the Rapa Nui even stopped building their famous *moai* statues. Seeking to explain this calamity, Diamond argues that the Rapa Nui rapaciously and myopically felled the forest to extract wood for cooking, housing, canoes, and rolling logs to transport the massive *moai*. The destruction of the island's natural environment resulted in food scarcity that ultimately led to catastrophic population declines (down to a few thousand by the time Europeans first arrived), increased warfare, and social breakdown (there is even evidence of cannibalism). Diamond concludes by writing that "the meaning of Easter Island for us should be chillingly obvious. Easter Island is Earth writ small." In Diamond's view, as humans decimate our planet's resources, we risk inducing our own tragic collapse unless we "choose to learn from the fates of societies like Easter's."[17]

The second article is "Rethinking the Fall of Easter Island" by Terry Hunt, published in *American Scientist* in 2006. Hunt relates at the outset of the article that he came to Rapa Nui intending to confirm the traditional narrative expounded by Diamond and others, but his research unearthed evidence that contradicted the prevailing theory. First, Hunt's studies of a beach on Rapa Nui indicated that the island was not settled until as late as 1200 CE (instead of previous estimates of habitation by 800 CE or perhaps even earlier). This difference is significant because it renders infeasible Diamond's argument for anthropogenic deforestation, which started far too quickly after 1200 CE to be blamed directly on humans. This brings Hunt to his second point: Rats, not humans, were responsible for deforestation. Ample archaeological

17 Diamond, "Easter's End," 63-69.

evidences indicates that rats arrived and flourished on the island, dining on the seeds of the palm trees, preventing the species from reproducing and quickly destroying the forest. As such, humans were only indirectly responsible for the island's deforestation, as the true culprits were the rats they brought with them. Third, Hunt argues that Diamond's peak population estimates are far too high. Instead, he argues that the human population never rose above 3,000. If this is true, there was no dramatic pre-European social collapse as described by Diamond. Instead, there was a society that steadily eked out an existence for centuries until the arrival of Europeans, who brought devastating diseases and enslaved the inhabitants of the island. In Hunt's words, "it was genocide, not ecocide that caused the demise of the Rapanui."[18]

Thus, students encounter two decidedly different arguments about the history of society on Rapa Nui. In addition to reading the articles for homework, I have students craft a written response in which they complete three tasks. First, they are asked to paraphrase both authors' arguments. I rarely ask students to merely paraphrase an article, but in this case, it is important for students to really focus in on the structure of each author's argument. I am assessing whether students can identify the author's central argument, the major claims supporting that argument, and some of the evidence that supports those claims—in other words, whether they can map what I call the "anatomy" of each argument. Second, I ask students: What do Diamond and Hunt fundamentally disagree about? Hopefully, students do not merely identify that the two authors draw different conclusions about what happened to the Rapa Nui. Instead, they should articulate that the authors' different macro-conclusions rest on disagreements about the cause of deforestation, peak population size, and estimated human arrival date. Third, I have students write down two researchable questions that would help them decide which author is correct. Ideally, this forces students to identify the pivotal disagreements between the

18 Hunt, "Rethinking," 412-419.

two authors and consider the kinds of historical evidence that could help resolve their disputes.[19]

Class Discussion: Deconstructing and Assessing Arguments

Given that not every student fully grasps both articles at first, it is important to start class with a discussion in which the class collectively maps out each argument. I start by elucidating Diamond's argument, careful to make sure that students are articulating the links between evidence and conclusions. Then I lead a discussion of Hunt's argument, asking students to articulate Hunt's challenges to Diamond. I push students to not only discuss the "discrepancies" that Hunt discovers, but also articulate *why those discrepancies affect Diamond's argument*. Below is a "discussion map" for each article.

Discussion Questions for Diamond article

- According to Diamond, what are some aspects of Rapa Nui society that had disappeared by the 1800s?
- According to Diamond, why did this social collapse ensue?
- Why didn't the Rapa Nui change their ways to avoid this environmental destruction?
- To Diamond, Easter Island is a cautionary tale. How are Easter Island and Earth similar? What's the moral of this story for our society?

Discussion Questions for Hunt article

- When does Hunt believe humans first arrived on Rapa Nui? Why does this challenge Diamond's argument?
- What does Hunt believe really caused the deforestation on the island? What evidence supports that claim?
- According to Hunt, what was the peak population on Rapa Nui? Why does that challenge Diamond's argument for social collapse?
- What does Hunt mean when he says that "it was genocide not ecocide?"

19 Many of my students "nailed" this assignment, successfully articulating the structure of each argument, the crucial disagreements between the authors, and thoughtful research questions (for example, one student got to the crux of the issue by asking "What were the peak populations of humans and rats on the island, and at what time did they occur?"). Others struggled to offer more than superficial renderings of each argument and posed research questions that failed to get to the meat of the debate. For example, one student asked, "What is the Europeans' viewpoint on how they treated the Rapanui?" This is an interesting historical question, but knowing the answer would not help us settle the dispute between Diamond and Hunt.

After mapping out the two arguments, we get to the fun part; I ask students with whom they agree. In my experience, this part of the discussion runs itself quite well, as the students argue with each other quite enthusiastically. As a teacher, one is tempted to just sit back and watch, and there is some value in letting students drive the discussion. However, I also find that it is important to intervene at times to move the discussion in the best direction. For example, I often step in to force the students to explain their reasoning for supporting a particular argument, or to explain why they think an author's reasoning is flawed or biased—they need to not just assert but *defend* their views by articulating logical support. Additionally, depending on the class, I have sometimes found it necessary to play devil's advocate. Students generally end up siding with Hunt, in part because they read Hunt's critique of Diamond but not Diamond's counter-defense.[20] I push students, for example, to think about the potential weaknesses in Hunt's argument; for example, he argues for a later date of human arrival based on findings from one beach, but what about evidence of human habitation on other beaches?

Meta-Discussion: Uncovering Potential Agendas

To close the discussion, I ask students: "What's the moral of this story?" That is, what broader lessons about "doing history" are illuminated that transcend the specific question of "What really happened on Rapa Nui?" I typically allow students to discuss this in small groups before opening a large-group discussion on the subject, and students generally come up with valuable insights. For example, a student will always point out that the "truth" about the past is not always clear, and historians often debate which version of history is correct. Along these lines, students often

20 Diamond's response is available online. See Jared Diamond, "The Myths of Easter Island—Jared Diamond Responds," Mark Lynas, last modified September 22, 2011, http://www.marklynas.org/2011/09/the-myths-of-easter-island-jared-diamond-responds/

make valuable points about the importance of remaining open-minded rather than only looking for evidence that supports a pre-ordained conclusion. It is also common for students to say that history can teach us lessons about the present—that is, they channel Diamond's argument that the destruction of society on Rapa Nui has something to teach us about what we are doing to our own environment.

These are all valuable points, but I ultimately try to build towards a discussion of an author's *agenda*—the underlying motives or goals that inform an author's work. Without fail, a student will point out that for Diamond, Easter Island functions as a fable about self-induced environmental destruction. As such, we have some reason to be skeptical of Diamond's claims because he has an environmentalist agenda—made clear in statements like "If we continue to follow our present course, we shall have exhausted the world's" resources and that "my main hope for my sons' generation is that we may now choose to learn from the fates of societies like Easter's." Students speculate that this concern might have driven Diamond to see human-caused environmental destruction as the culprit on Easter Island because he is worrying about the damage humans are currently doing to our environment. Indeed, this potential for distortion is nearly always present when people make historical analogies, which are frequently deployed to serve some ideological end. If it has not already emerged in class discussion, I introduce students to the concept of "confirmation bias," that once someone has an interpretation (particularly one in which they are personally invested), they will tend to look for evidence that confirms that interpretation and discount evidence that challenges it.

While students are quick to identify Diamond's potential agenda, they are less likely to see such ulterior motives at work in Hunt's article. Indeed, Hunt explicitly states at the outset of his article that he came to Easter Island expecting to confirm the traditional interpretation of anthropogenic catastrophe, which

lends him credibility in the eyes of many students. However, I try to give students hints that point to a potential agenda driving Hunt's interpretation. I ask students whether it could be professionally advantageous for a scholar to challenge an existing theory. I also point out that unlike Hunt, Diamond is the rare example of an academic who has become a bestselling author, with enormously successful books like the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. Armed with those hints, a student usually infers that Hunt might have a personal or professional incentive to challenge the canonical interpretation of a well-known scholar. In academia, there is a premium on work that "advances the field," and as such, an article that successfully challenges the prevailing perspective has the potential to make more of a "splash" than another article that affirms the existing interpretation. As such, Hunt could be eager to find evidence that challenges the traditional views regarding Rapa Nui, becoming susceptible to another form of confirmation bias.

I close this discussion by making a clear disclaimer to my students, and I figure I owe the same disclaimer to the readers of this article. *I do not know* whether Diamond or Hunt deserves to be criticized for allowing an agenda to distort their scholarship—in particular, the hypotheses about Hunt's agenda are quite speculative. Both scholars are far more formidable than I, and far more knowledgeable about Rapa Nui. Indeed, as consumers of scholarship, we nearly always will be reading work by scholars who know more about the subject than we do. But that does not require us to suspend a critical perspective. Whether we are reading scholarly work, a newspaper article, or a Facebook post, we must cultivate a healthy skepticism and always be on the lookout for an agenda that could compromise an interpretation. We must critically consider various aspects of any argument: the selection of evidence, the logical strength of interpretations of that evidence, and the coherence of an overarching argument—all while being mindful of how a preexisting agenda might be at work.

Extension Activity: Refining Evaluation of Arguments with Supplemental Research

I finish the mini-unit with an activity that allows students to conduct further research to help them determine which scholar's interpretation is more persuasive. I personally believe that it is not really possible for students to meaningfully "pick a side" based merely on the articles by Hunt and Diamond. Both authors offer promising but potentially flawed interpretations, and in both cases, we would want to learn more before determining whose interpretation of Rapa Nui is correct. To this end, I split the students into groups of around four students for a research activity in which their job is to find more information that helps them assess which argument they find more compelling.[21] Each group's first task is to determine a set of researchable questions that will help them achieve this goal. Crucially, these should not just be any questions about Easter Island. They should be questions to *speak to the fundamental disagreements* between Hunt and Diamond.[22] Students are then tasked with identifying articles that can help answer these questions, an endeavor that requires them to hone their skills as savvy consumers of information on the internet. I have some students use library databases and have some students use Google to find articles.[23] As each group member finds reputable

21 Most recently, I used a 105-minute "finals period" to complete this activity, but some of the work could be done for homework in order to save class time.

22 Some examples of valuable research questions could be: When exactly *did* humans arrive on the island? What was the peak population on Rapa Nui? What was the relative importance of humans vs. rats in effecting the deforestation of the island? What evidence is there of increased violent conflict on the island?

23 Our high school is part of the University of Illinois, and therefore has an immense array of databases that would not be available to the average high school student. However, Google also allows them to find some gems. Some students were overjoyed to find Diamond responding to criticism from Hunt and another scholar named Carl Lipo, as well as Hunt and Lipo responding to Diamond's response! See Jared Diamond, "The Myths of Easter Island—Jared Diamond Responds," and Carl Lipo and Terry Hunt, "The Myths of Easter Island—Jared Diamond Responds," Mark Lynas, last modified October 10, 2011, http://www.marklynas.org/2011/10/the-easter-island-ecocide-never-happened-response-to-jared-diamond/

sources, they write down the citation information from the article, why they consider it to be a reputable source, and a summary of information in the reading that confirms, rebuts, or qualifies Hunt and Diamond's arguments.

A few valuable "meta-lessons" emerge from this process. First, students must pay close attention to the *date of publication* of their sources. More recent research deserves extra consideration, especially because scholars have developed more sophisticated scientific techniques for interpreting archaeological artifacts in recent years. In particular, students should look for articles published after 2006, when Hunt's work reframed the Rapa Nui debate. Second, students should pay close attention to *where the information is coming from* in a given article. For example, some students found popular science articles that seemed to corroborate Hunt's argument. But upon closer examination, it became clear that these articles were merely using Hunt as a source. This does little to enhance confidence in Hunt's findings; it would be more significant if an independent scholar found the same results as Hunt did.

After students have spent time reading and summarizing one or more articles (depending on the length of the article), the final task is to *synthesize* their findings with fellow group members. Each student shares what they found in their article(s) with their teammates, and then the group tries to reach some level of agreement on what they believe really happened on Rapa Nui. The culmination of this process is a co-authored paragraph that each group submits by the end of the class period, stating the group's conclusions.[24] While student responses varied, the most common interpretation was to try to reconcile the arguments of Diamond and Hunt in some way. For example, students often concluded that Hunt was right to emphasize significance of the rats in the island's

24 All of the written work described here—the research questions, the citation information, the justification for the reliability of the source, the article summaries, and the synthesis—are written by each group in a shared Google Doc that was ultimately shared with me.

deforestation, while still holding that archaeological findings support Diamond's general narrative of resource depletion and increased violent conflict on the island. Another common "conclusion" in these syntheses was continued uncertainty. This, in itself, provides a frustrating but valuable lesson about the historical endeavor—that interpretive disagreements are not necessarily easily resolved by a brief foray into research.

Assessment of Long-Term Effectiveness: Student Recollections, 20 Months Later

As a means of assessing the impact of these lessons, I conducted surveys in August 2018, asking students for their insights regarding how to grapple with competing historical interpretations of the same event or subject. I surveyed 58 current juniors, who had completed the Rapa Nui unit discussed in this article during their Freshman World History class. Necessity required that I had to survey these students long after the fact—I recently switched from teaching World History to US History and therefore no longer have cause to teach about Rapa Nui—but these circumstances did allow me to try to assess the long-term impact of the unit. Presumably, if students could still articulate the significance of these lessons after 20 months, that would suggest especially powerful evidence of the utility of these lessons.

In the survey, I briefly reminded students about the perspectives of Diamond and Hunt,[25] and then posed the open-ended question: "Based on your (perhaps fuzzy) recollections of those Easter Island lessons, what were some of the 'big points' that I was trying to make about history during that unit?" After combing through the 58 student responses, it was possible to discern certain themes

25 The introductory text was, "Remember the lessons we did about Easter Island, where you read the articles by the two different historians? One of them, Jared Diamond, argued that the Rapanui chopped down all their trees and destroyed their own environment. The other guy, Terry Hunt, said that Jared Diamond was wrong. He argued that rats were more responsible for the decimation of the forest, and there was no big human-induced social collapse."

in the responses, which happily coincided with many of the key insights that I hoped the Rapa Nui unit would instill in students. Here are descriptions of those themes, along with the titles I gave them:

- **Multiple Causation:** Many students made a distinct point, that often there *are* multiple historical factors that lead to a historical outcome. In other words, one reason that there are multiple interpretations is that there is more than one "right answer."
- **Different Scholarly Interpretations:** Many students made the (perhaps obvious but nevertheless important) point that historians often disagree and can draw different conclusions about the same historical topic.
- **Bias Guides Interpretation**: Many students argued that the case of Easter Island shows that a historian's bias or agenda can shape their historical argument, or perhaps compromise its reliability (sometimes, students specifically identified Diamond's environmentalist agenda).
- **Lack of Evidence**: Many students wrote that a lack of sources makes it challenging for the historian to interpret what happened on Easter Island.
- **Difficult to Determine Truth**: Many students emphasized that it was hard, or perhaps even impossible, to know what really happened in the past (not surprisingly, many of these students also discussed the "lack of evidence" issue mentioned above).

Since I was interested in the frequency with which students mentioned certain ideas, I coded each response based on whether it mentioned any of the above themes (most responses mentioned multiple themes). Because this involved some subjective decision making, I enlisted the help of two students as research assistants, who also independently coded each response based on themes I identified. We ultimately reconciled any disparities, and I recorded

that data in Table 1, which lists the title and description of each of the themes, the numerical and percentage frequency of each theme, and one or two example student responses that illustrate each response category.

Table 1

Response Category Title	Response Category	Frequency	
		Number	Percentage
Multiple Causation	**Multiple different factors collectively cause a given historical event/process; both explanations could have merit**	**20**	**34.5%**
Example Response: "Many things affect history. There were many reasons why the environment collapsed - likely both arguments are warranted because both rats and people were factors."			
Different Scholarly Interpretations	**Historians often disagree/can arrive at different conclusions about the same topic**	**37**	**63.8%**
Example Response: "History leaves many things open to multiple explanations and interpretations - a lack of complete documentation makes many topics partially speculative. However, logic and reasoning is a huge part of history: Examining the relationships between multiple events and linking many pieces of evidence is essential for making assumptions that are probable."			
Bias Guides Interpretation	**One/both of the historical arguments were affected by bias/agenda of the authors**	**19**	**32.8%**
Example Response: "What is the bias of the person writing the article? Jared Diamond's goal was/may have been to promote awareness for the environment, and so he may have over exaggerated details or interpreted them in specific ways to make his point." Example Response: "History is not always an unbiased explanation. Bias is completely unavoidable, and sometimes intentional. Therefore, trusting every source you meet is not the way to go about research. Each source should be approached with an equal amount of doubt and further research can always be done, and most often should be done. Multiple sources are necessary for a rounded view of the topic."			
Lack of Evidence	**Sometimes there is insufficient evidence (making it hard to draw conclusions)**	**16**	**27.6%**
Example Response: "I remember you compared history to a dark room with only a small hint of light, and historians were trying to determine as much as they could of what was in that room. Due to this lack of light, inferences can be varied and in many cases, we can't really know everything, but we can do our best to understand."			
Difficult to determine truth	**It may not be possible to know what really happened in the past**	**14**	**24.1%**
Example: "There are multiple possibilities. History is a very muddled subject. We know very little for sure. We have a small bundle of facts which we have to use to piece together a plausible explanation. People don't know everything, and people are very often wrong about history."			

It is hard to know whether these results represent a "success"—theoretically, an ideal result would be that 100% of students mentioned all five of these themes (or perhaps others). However, it is unrealistic to assume that every student taking an in-class survey would be able (and willing) to spontaneously produce every possible implication of lessons delivered 20 months prior. While I am unsure what percentage thresholds would represent "success," I can at least make the more tentative statement that it is heartening that a significant number of students mentioned each of these themes (and 56 of 58 students mentioned at least one of them), and that several students offered particularly sophisticated insights that demonstrated complex historical thinking and a strong recollection of the lessons.

In addition to the specific question about Rapa Nui, I also posed three more general survey questions, asking students about the challenge of considering two competing historical interpretations. The survey started with a statement that read: "Imagine you read two articles about the same historical topic. Both are written by historians with PhDs, but they have significantly different interpretations of the subject." This introductory text was followed by three open-ended survey questions. For example, one asked: "What criteria should you—as a student doing research—consider when trying to determine the most convincing explanation of that historical topic?[26] After collecting the student responses, I identified common themes and then coded the qualitative data with the help of research assistants—the same basic procedure that I followed with the Rapa Nui question.[27] Additionally, I asked the same survey questions to a control group: students at my school who had never taken my class. This allowed me to assess whether students who had taken my class were disproportionately

26 The other two questions were: "Q1: What factors might lead historians to draw different conclusions about the same historical subject?" and "Q3: After reading and considering the two articles, what additional steps could you take that would help you determine the most persuasive explanation of that historical topic?

27 I would like to thank my research assistants: Raine Bernhard, Solomia Dzhaman, Annette Lee, Samuel Li, Kate Snyder, Bella Solis, Jessica Valete, and Tina Wayne.

likely to discuss certain themes in their responses. If my students were more likely to mention a certain theme than were students in the control group, one could perhaps tentatively conclude that the Easter Island lessons had influenced my students' historical thinking.

I entered into this process well aware of the shortcomings of such an approach. First, there was no way of knowing that any significant differences that presented themselves actually arose as a result of the Easter Island lessons, rather than many other lessons and projects that dealt with historiographical thinking. Secondly, the control group (which was mostly freshmen, as I have taught all the juniors and seniors at my school) was younger than my treatment group, and therefore perhaps a difference in intellectual maturity would be responsible for any differences rather than any lessons that I had taught. Third, the subjective nature of the coding process (even though I tried to control for this by using multiple research assistants) endangers the reliability of any data. Finally, this kind of survey is not the best instrument to assess acquisition of historical thinking skills. Despite these shortcomings, I will share some of my findings, while acknowledging that they should be taken with caution.

After analyzing the data, I found that for almost all of the "response categories," there was no significant difference between the response frequencies of my students and those of the control group.[28] For example, as you can see in Table 2, my students were just as likely to posit that evidentiary issues could be responsible for differences between competing historical interpretations.

28 There was only one other response category with a statistically significant ($p<.05$) difference between the treatment and control groups. When asked, "What factors might lead historians to draw different conclusions about the same historical subject?" my students were significantly more likely to speculate that the two historians were focusing on two different aspects of the same topic. As one student put it, "They may also be choosing to focus on different parts of a historical subject, such as emphasizing environmental factors more than cultural ones, and hence draw different conclusions." Still, this wasn't a frequent response (15.5% of my students mentioned this issue, compared to just 4.7% of the control group, for p-value of .045).

However, there was one important response category for which the difference between the treatment and control group was statistically significant ($p<.05$): My students were significantly more likely to say that the bias or agenda of the historian could be responsible for differences between historical interpretations. Forty-four point eight percent of my students mentioned bias as a relevant criterion, while just 25.0% of students in the control group did the same ($p=.021$). This was obviously an intriguing finding, since the Rapa Nui lessons discussed in this article focus heavily on the issue of potential bias (and importantly, my students responded to this particular survey question *before* being reminded of the Rapa Nui unit). However, if this difference is related to my teaching at all—and I am not convinced that it is—I would argue that it is the result of my general focus on bias and agenda shaping historical interpretations (which shows up throughout my curriculum), rather than the Rapa Nui unit specifically. Indeed, I would generally argue that learning to think historically is an ongoing process rather than a matter of flipping an "on/off" switch. Historical thinking skills are gradually honed over a long period of time rather than quickly achieved as a result of a discrete lesson.

Table 2

Question 2: What criteria should you—as a student doing research—consider when trying to determine the most convincing explanation of that historical topic?				
Response Category Title	Response Category	Treatment Group Frequency	Control Group Frequency	p-value*
Author's Credibility	Determine the credibility of the historian (e.g. based on scholarly credentials)	31.0%	37.5%	.453
Bias	**Consider the historian's bias or agenda**	**44.8%**	**25.0%**	**.021****
Evidence	Determine if author uses sufficient evidence, or assess reliability of evidence	48.3%	50.0%	.849
Logical Interpretation	Determine whether the author's interpretation of the evidence is logical	20.7%	14.1%	.333
Context of Publication	Consider when the scholarship was written, or why it was written	24.1%	18.8%	.468

*Two-tailed p-value based on a Z-Test that was used to compare the two proportions.
**Statisitically significant, $p<.05$

Conclusion: Promoting a Healthy Level of Skepticism about Historical Interpretations

Hopefully, readers find my description of this lesson on Rapa Nui useful. Perhaps some might choose to teach a similar lesson using the same articles by Jared Diamond and Terry Hunt—I would certainly recommend doing so, as it led to particularly spirited discussion in my classroom. However, at a deeper level, I offer this description of classroom practice as just one example of how to expose students to historiographical debate as an integral element of history class. If history education scholar Bruce VanSledright is correct that in a traditional history class, "the obsession appears to be with the products of historical study, not with the practice of doing it," then focusing on historiographical debates seems like a valuable antidote.[29] In a World History class, for example, one could cultivate historiographical thinking by exploring different explanations of the fall of the Roman Empire (or an even more delectable historiographical debate, is "decline and fall" even the right paradigm for thinking about the Roman Empire during Late Antiquity?). In a U.S. History class, the possibilities also abound: Was the American Revolution radical or conservative? Why did slavery replace indentured servitude in the American South? Did the experience of settling the frontier create a distinctive American identity, as famously argued by Frederick Jackson Turner?[30] To grapple with these historical questions, students would need to critically unpack the work of scholars—carefully identifying the evidence they use, the interpretative claims supported by that evidence, and the conclusions those scholars draw. And students would undoubtedly need to assess whether historians have an agenda that might shape their argument. These students

29 Bruce VanSledright, "Confronting History's Interpretive Paradox While Teaching Fifth Graders to Investigate the Past," *American Educational Research Journal* 39, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 1091.

30 For ideas about how to incorporate historiographical debate into a U.S. History curriculum, a commonly used text is Larry Madaras and James SoRelle, eds., *Taking Sides: Clashing Views in United States History*, 17th ed, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2017). There are two volumes that collectively cover the scope of U.S. History.

would experience history class as a forum for interpretation and argument rather than a site for the accumulation and regurgitation of historical data. In other words, such lessons would help students hone historiographical thinking.

While I hope I have successfully argued that promoting this kind of thinking is a good thing for students, there is also a line of thinking that should be discouraged. Consider the following set of logical conclusions that a (clever) student might make: If history is not a collection of facts but instead an array of competing interpretations, then there is no "true past" that we can recover. Taken to the extreme, the student might conclude that all interpretations are flawed and none should be considered any more valid than any other interpretation. Instead, all historical arguments are merely products of an author's agenda that should only be considered as expressions of the bias of the author (or the teacher!). Or alternatively, even if some interpretations are truly more or less valid, we cannot reliably deduce which are better than others, since our own (confirmation) biases cloud our judgement. Thus, the healthy skepticism of the critical thinker can descend into epistemological nihilism.

It need not. While this kind of lesson hopefully forces students to destabilize the authority of scholars and grapple with the potentially problematic impact of an author's agenda, it also is premised on the idea that a consumer of knowledge should be striving to determine the best available interpretation. Students should discard some theories after the bare minimum of investigation; after all, some authors offer wild speculation about the *moai* being built and transported by extraterrestrial visitors.[31] For more empirically grounded arguments, students should be

31 For a classic work of conspiratorial pseudoscience, see Erich von Daniken, *Gods from Outer Space: Return to the Stars or Evidence for the Impossible* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1968). His ideas were popularized for a new generation by The History Channel's *Ancient Aliens*, which discussed extraterrestrial explanations regarding the *moai* in the series pilot and in several subsequent episodes. Needless to say, numerous websites link Easter Island to alien visitors.

able to map the anatomies of competing arguments and identify key points of disagreement between competing interpretations. Then they can conduct follow-up research that seeks to resolve those disputes. Thus, students can arrive at their own tentative conclusions about "the truth"—or at least, come to decide which interpretation or combination of interpretations seems most probable based on the existing evidence. Such an endeavor is vital to historical and historiographical thinking, as well as informed citizenship and the intelligent consumption of news on the internet. While this lesson on Rapa Nui is surely insufficient for students to master these skills, it provides an incremental means to hone them, giving them practice asking questions like: What evidence is the author using? Are the interpretations persuasive? Can I do further research to corroborate or challenge this interpretation? At the very least, I hope the lesson illuminates the fact that these are questions that should be asked rather than blindly trusting what a historian or history teacher says—or whatever comes up first in the Google search or atop the social media feed.

New Guidelines for SoTL in History: A Discipline Considers the SoTL Turn?

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The last decade has included significant milestones in terms of the relationship between the discipline of history and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). Such developments offer an instructive opportunity to reflect on the state of the field within history and suggest that SoTL, while currently holding a limited and inconsistent position in terms of practice among historians, provides a promising opportunity for growth as history educators increasingly reframe the teaching and learning of the discipline around the skills of historians. While historians have discussed the teaching of history since the founders of the American Historical Association (AHA) claimed at its first meeting in 1884 that "few of the American universities give as yet any adequate historical instruction," the AHA's Tuning Project reflects new, concerted efforts to define the discipline in terms of "the distinctive skills, methods, and substantive range of [the] field."[1] The Tuning Project's establishment of "Core Competencies and Learning Outcomes" in 2013 and its revision of the document in 2016 reflected the challenges of establishing a clear consensus regarding what students should know and understand after completing a history major. The Tuning Project's focus on core competencies in history did not include any overt references to SoTL research. However, the efforts of the AHA, as the oldest and most prominent professional organization of historians in the

1 "First Meeting of the American Historical Association (1884)," https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/historical-archives/first-meeting-of-the-american-historical-association; "Tuning the History Discipline in the United States," https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/tuning-the-history-discipline.

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United States, to articulate the essential nature of the discipline and discreet learning outcomes for students of history was important for SoTL researchers. In addition to emphasizing inquiry skills rather than knowledge for five of the six learning outcomes, the Tuning Project articulated the specific ingredients of the history classroom that inform the questions, methods, and evidence of SoTL research in history.[2]

At the same time, historians acknowledged the challenge of assessing such learning goals, and in 2016, a special section of *The Journal of American History* focused on the current state of assessment in the field. Anne Hyde, who chaired the Tuning Project Leadership Core as then-chair of the AHA's Teaching Division, penned "Five Reasons Why Historians Suck at Assessment." This essay identified the substantial obstacles toward getting historians to embrace assessment as a key ingredient in teaching and learning. Hyde noted that historians frequently perceive assessment as not part of their responsibilities as teachers, disagree on learning goals in the classroom, and, in part due to a lack of expertise in educational assessment, struggle to assess the sort of learning often valued in history courses. Finally, Hyde explained how historians often associate assessment with the larger context of unpleasant and seemingly irrelevant academic and cultural politics. While a number of the essays in the section reflected the perspective that, at best, the efforts of historians to develop valuable approaches to assessment were a necessary hazard if only to keep others from imposing their assessments on historians, Hyde and others acknowledged the potential of rigorous assessment as a "shared set of tools" to improve curriculum and instruction.[3] Rather than what two of the authors lamented as "reflexive hostility to assessment," such exploratory efforts to better measure student

2 "AHA History Tuning Project: 2016 History Discipline Core," https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/tuning-the-history-discipline/2016-history-discipline-core.

3 Anne Hyde, "Five Reasons History Professors Suck at Assessment," *The Journal of American History* 102 no. 4 (2016): 1104-1107.

learning in history classrooms are increasingly perceived as, according to Scott E. Casper and Laura M. Westhoff, "surprising opportunities" and "forces for positive change."[4] As an endeavor focused on identifying problems, collecting evidence, and sharing conclusions related to pedagogy, SoTL research is especially well-suited for assisting individual instructors and departments of history in the creation, implementation, evaluation, and dissemination of meaningful assessments in the discipline.

Most recently, the AHA appears to have endorsed this argument. In January 2019, the AHA Council approved and publicized "Guidelines for the Incorporation of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in the Work of the History Profession." Authored by Natalie Mendoza, David Pace, and Laura Westhoff, the ambitious statement explained how "historians contribute to SoTL in five significant ways" and that, in addition to "its own value as an independent area of inquiry," SoTL research in history can provide "major contributions to our profession at all levels from K-12 through graduate programs." First, historians engaged in SoTL research forge a research agenda through which they "define intellectual problems in the field, systematically collect evidence, come to reasonable conclusions, and place their work in the context of a larger body of literature." Second, historians enrich their own work in the classroom as "scholarly teachers" through an understanding of "an evidence-based body of literature." Third, historians, informed by SoTL research, contribute to the development of "classroom practice, curriculum development, and faculty rewards and recognition." Fourth, SoTL research has great potential to play a key role in the "training of the next generation of historians" who will spend much of their careers in the classroom. Finally, the statement argued that the "AHA has the responsibility to promote this work, uphold standards for its

4 Scott E. Casper and Laura M. Westhoff, "Surprising Opportunities for Historians: Taking Control of the Assessment Process," *The Journal of American History* 102, no. 4 (2016): 1102-1103.

practice, and recognize its study as a scholarly endeavor and a means of improving the quality of teaching and learning in the discipline."[5]

However, the 2019 program from the AHA's annual conference in Chicago, where the organization approved the SoTL guidelines, provides a revealing measure of the current and limited status of SoTL within the discipline. On the positive side, HistorySoTL: The International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in History, an affiliated organization of the AHA, hosted a workshop on "Enduring Problems for History Teachers (and How to Manage Them)" which addressed such issues as historical literacy, curriculum and coverage, and assessment.[6] HistorySoTL has hosted successful workshops at AHA national conferences since 2016. Although there are many reasons for optimism, the AHA conference, the preeminent gathering of professional historians in the country, also demonstrated the precarious position of SoTL within the discipline. The 2019 conference program included at least twenty-six sessions dedicated to teaching, second only to the general topic of "profession" (which often also included discussions of teaching) and far more than such traditional historical topics as war, gender, religion, immigration, race, and politics.[7] However, while the exact nature of each presentation is difficult to discern from the program, it seems clear that, with a few notable exceptions such as Lendol Calder's research on assessing the historical thinking of undergraduates, the sessions largely reflected what the SoTL guidelines identified

5 "Guidelines for the Incorporation of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in the Work of the History Profession (2019)," https://www.historians.org/jobs-and-professional-development/statements-standards-and-guidelines-of-the-discipline/guidelines-for-the-incorporation-of-the-scholarship-of-teaching-and-learning-in-the-work-of-the-history-profession.

6 "HistorySoTL: The International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in History," http://www.indiana.edu/~histsotl/blog/.

7 American Historical Association Annual Conference Program 2019, https://www.historians.org/annual-meeting/past-meetings/2019-annual-meeting/2019-program.

as "wisdom of practice" presentations that describe the thoughtful work of accomplished teachers but are, as the new guidelines emphasize, "distinct from the theoretical and evidence-based exploration of pedagogical issues in the scholarship of teaching and learning."[8] Program abstracts mentioned such valuable topics as reflective practice, student engagement, and instructional strategies associated with important historical topics. However, such abstracts provided no hint that the teaching presentations centered on research problems, the analysis of evidence, or the burgeoning SoTL literature in history or related disciplines. In other words, the same conference that included the official adoption of SoTL guidelines for historians included little evidence that many scholars have embraced the sort of projects outlined in the guidelines.

Yet, two academic journals, *The History Teacher*, established in 1967, and *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods*, established in 1976, have taken deliberate steps to solicit and publish more articles related to SoTL research as further evidence of a discipline increasingly oriented toward SoTL.[9] This change reflects, in part, the impact of seminal scholarship most often associated with secondary history education. Works such as Sam Wineburg's *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts* (2001), Bruce VanSledright's *The Challenge of Rethinking History Education* (2011), and Peter Seixas and Tom Morton's *The Big Six: Historical Thinking Concepts* (2012), to name just three books, signified a revolution in history education that increasingly reframed the teaching and learning of history around the cognitive skills of

8 "Guidelines for the Incorporation of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in the Work of the History Profession (2019)" https://www.historians.org/jobs-and-professional-development/statements-standards-and-guidelines-of-the-discipline/guidelines-for-the-incorporation-of-the-scholarship-of-teaching-and-learning-in-the-work-of-the-history-profession.

9 *The History Teacher*, https://www.thehistoryteacher.org/; *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods*, https://openjournals.bsu.edu/teachinghistory.

historians.[10] Joel M. Sipress and David J. Voelker have noted that historians increasingly explored ways to address the "dichotomy between history as a 'way of knowing' and history as a subject to be learned."[11] And, importantly, Peter Felton, a historian from Elon University, served as President of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) from 2016-2017, while the current president of the prominent organization is Mills Kelly, a historian from George Mason University. Conference programs from ISSOTL meetings indicate that historians have a presence in this larger body of research.[12]

Recent years have also included prominent publications on SoTL from historians, such as David Pace's *Decoding the Disciplines Paradigm* (2017) and Joan Middendorf and Leah Shopkow's *Overcoming Student Learning Bottlenecks* (2018), as well as a growing number of journal articles and book chapters such as Lendol Calder and Tracy Steffes' chapter in *Improving Quality in American Education* (2016) entitled, "Measuring

10 Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press: 2001); Bruce VanSledright, *The Challenge of Rethinking History Education: On Practices, Theory, and Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Peter Seixas and Tom Morton, *The Big Six: Historical Thinking Concepts* (Toronto: Nelson Publishing, 2012).

11 Joel M. Sipress and David J. Voelker, "From Learning History to Doing History," in *Exploring Signature Pedagogies: Approaches to Teaching Disciplinary Habits of Mind*, eds. Regan A. R. Gurung, Nancy L. Chick, and Aeron Haynie (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2009), 19-35.

12 Recent examples of work by historians at ISSOTL meetings include Sara Sundberg's session entitled, "Reacting to the Past: Qualitative Assessment of History Learning in the Undergraduate Classroom" and a session on a graduate history course led by Kelly Schrum and Amy Swan entitled, "Finding the 'Ah-ha' Moment: Using Digital Spaces to Scaffold Inquiry-Based Learning." The 2018 ISSOTL conference, held in Bergan Norway, included a panel entitled, "Resourcing the History Discipline: Learning Cultures in Australian and British Universities" by historians Adele Nye, Peter D'Sena, and Jennifer Clark. It underscored the increasingly global nature of SoTL work in history and the potential for international and comparative research projects. See ISSOTL Annual Conference Programs at https://www.issotl.com/2018.

College Learning in History."[13] In the research sponsored by the Social Science Research Council and informed by Measuring College Learning Panels, Calder and Steffes surveyed "the History of History Learning Outcomes." They identified the increasing commitment of historians to teaching historical thinking rather than courses limited to "cultural literacy, historical knowledge, or specific content." They also outlined the "Essential Concepts" and "Essential Competencies" that historians can use to drive assessment and SoTL research in history and to make meaningful decisions about curriculum and classroom instruction.[14]

The project described five core concepts for students in history:

1. History: History is an interpretive account of the past supported by evidence that survives.
2. The Past: Recognizing the "pastness of the past" directs historians to understand people of the past by contextualizing their actions.
3. Historical Evidence: Historians use primary and secondary sources to make sense of the past.
4. Complex Causality: Historical accounts are multiple and layered, avoiding monocausal explanations and reductionist thinking.
5. Significance: The indefinite standard by which historians determine what questions are worth asking; what parts of the past are worth teaching, learning, and remembering.

Similarly, students in history should be able to demonstrate

13 Lendol Calder and Tracy Steffes, "Measuring College Learning in History," in *Improving Quality in American Higher Education: Learning Outcomes and Assessments for the 21st Century*, eds. Richard Arum, Josipa Roksa, and Amanda Cook (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 37-86.
14 Social Science Research Council, "Measuring College Learning Project + Resource Center," http://highered.ssrc.org/projects/measuring-college-learning-project/history/.

four fundamental skills:

> 1. Evaluate Historical Accounts: Identify an author's interpretation and critically scrutinize the evidence and analysis used to support it.
> 2. Interpret Primary Sources: Assess the credibility of sources and make judgements about their usefulness and limitations as evidence about the past.
> 3. Apply Chronological Reasoning: Take account of the role of time, sequencing, and periodization in historical narratives.
> 4. Construct a historical argument using primary sources... that demonstrate understanding of historical concepts, especially the nature of historical evidence, interpretation, and perspective.[15]

These important concepts and skills are, according to the authors, crucial to communicating the "value of historical study" and establishing "its value with evidence."[16] Not only has SoTL research in history informed the conclusions of the Measuring College Learning panels, SoTL projects in history offer an unparalleled way to systematically examine, measure, and publicize the effectiveness of pedagogy aimed at promoting such concepts and skills.

Advocating for the increased practice of SoTL to promote and assess the effective teaching of history may be even more important than simply improving classroom instruction. The AHA's much-discussed 2018 "History Majors Report" detailed the sharp decline in the number of history majors in American colleges in recent years.[17] The report's author, Benjamin M. Schmidt, stressed the

15 Ibid.
16 Calder and Steffes, 37.
17 Benjamin M. Schmidt, "The History BA Since the Great Recession: The 2018 AHA Majors Report," November 26, 2018, https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/december-2018/the-history-ba-since-the-great-recession-the-2018-aha-majors-report.

impact of the economic recession on shaping the perspectives of undergraduate students toward the history major and the liberal arts in general. Others have argued that the decreasing interest of history departments in political, military, and economic history since the ascendance of social history in the 1960s is to blame for the "slow-motion suicide" of the discipline.[18] As the AHA released its report on the decline of majors, Jill Lepore, Harvard historian and frequent writer for *The New Yorker,* argued in an interview in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* that the demise of history stemmed from the unfortunate retreat of historians from the larger dialogue of public intellectuals.[19] National publications such as *The New Yorker* and *Time Magazine* commented on the "The Decline of Historical Thinking" and the importance of studying the past at a time in which citizens need "historical knowledge and historical perspectives" to make sense of the world.[20]

While such reactions may include as much hyperbole as insight, growing concerns over the health of the discipline in secondary and higher education is ultimately the strongest argument for embracing SoTL research. For example, in contrast to older notions of history education that revolved around students mastering essential historical narratives, recent SoTL projects have emphasized "decoding the discipline" and the need to identify and address the key "threshold concepts" and "bottlenecks" within the discipline that shape the progress of history students within our classes and across the curriculum.[21] The Scholarship of Teaching

18 Hal Brands and Francis J. Gavin, "The Historical Profession is Committing Slow-Motion Suicide," *War on the Rocks*, December 10, 2018.
19 Evan Goldstein, "The Academy is Largely Itself Responsible for Its Own Peril," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 13, 2018, https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Academy-Is-Largely/245080.
20 Eric Alterman, "The Decline of Historical Thinking, " *The New Yorker*, February 4, 2019, https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-decline-of-historical-thinking; Jason Steinhauer, "Fewer Students are Majoring in History, But We're Asking the Wrong Questions about Why," *Time Magazine*, December 6, 2018, https://time.com/5472828/history-majors/.
21 David Pace, *Decoding the Disciplines Paradigm* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana

and Learning offers the best opportunity for a clear, rigorous, and public alternative to discussions of history education far too often characterized by anecdotal evidence, tradition, and cultural debates. In addition to the intellectual engagement of exploring "scholarly arguments about pedagogy," SoTL provides instructors with the sort of rich evidence of teaching and learning needed to create what Sipress and Voelker described as a "signature pedagogy" that will enable historians to better articulate the nature and value of history education in the twenty-first century.[22]

University Press, 2018); http://decodingthedisciplines.org/; Leah Shopkow, Arlene Diaz, Joan Middendorf, and David Pace, "The History Learning Project 'Decodes' a Disicpline," in *Ebbs, Flows, and Rips: The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning In and Across Disciplines,* ed. Kathleen McKinney (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012); Leah Shopkow, "From Bottlenecks to Epistemology in History: Changing the Conversation about the Teaching of History in Colleges and Universities," in *Changing the Conversation About Higher Education,* ed. Robert Thompson (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2013).

22 Sipress and Voelker, 32.

Teaching Historical Literacy within a SOTL Framework

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The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) posits that educators can, and should, approach educational matters with the same rigor used to examine traditional fields of inquiry. In the SoTL approach, one identifies a learning problem, formulates methods to address it, gathers actual evidence of students' progress, then shares findings with the broader academic community.[1] Also like traditional research, SoTL situates teaching and learning within theoretical frameworks. My workshop at the 2019 American Historical Association conference stressed this latter aspect, using textual analysis as an example. Simply put: We can devise more effective reading techniques, and we can better evaluate their results, if we understand some theories and findings surrounding learning and historical reading skills. The goal of this short article is to introduce readers to some of those constructs and to offer some rudimentary techniques that instructors can implement as part of a SoTL approach to improved historical literacy.

Three key concepts are especially useful as a foundation here. The first, "learning bottlenecks," draws attention to inherent points of difficulty that students must work through when faced with an unfamiliar task.[2] In the case of reading documents from the past, a common bottleneck is that such artifacts often cannot be read at face value but must be carefully analyzed and contextualized in

1 See the pioneering article by Randy Bass, "The Scholarship of Teaching: What's the Problem?" *Inventio* 1, no. 1 (1999): <https://my.vanderbilt.edu/sotl/files/2013/08/Bass-Problem1.pdf>.

2 Joan Middendorf and Leah Shopkow, *Overcoming Student Learning Bottlenecks* (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2018).

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order to reveal deeper meaning. The second concept, "decoding," is a metacognitive exercise involving the careful examination of what an expert does to get through a given bottleneck.[3] By identifying the many, often subconscious steps involved in the reading process, an instructor is in a better position to guide students through the stages of extracting both explicit and implicit information from a text. To operationalize that process involves the third concept of "deliberate practice," or the specific activities students must partake in, based on decoding, to clear a learning bottleneck. This is the phase where significant learning can occur, because it often challenges students' natural tendencies and assumptions, and because it is focused on clearly delineated steps that learners must take for increased understanding. Of note is that deliberate practice is hard work. Its leading advocate, psychologist Anders Ericsson, has determined that this type of activity is not enjoyable and requires the guidance and feedback of an expert for improvement.[4]

To see how these concepts can be brought together to help our learners, one can imagine the following scenario: It is the end of class, and the instructor reminds students that for homework, they need to read a textbook chapter, a journal article, a popular website column, and a primary source. As an experienced professional, the instructor understands that these readings were created for different audiences and different purposes and thus must be read in unique ways. But to many students, it is all likely just words on a page or screen, and their job is to read for content and memorize as much of it as possible. Research on the reading habits of experts and non-experts has shown this lack of source differentiation to be but one major difference between the two groups.[5]

3 David Pace, *The Decoding the Disciplines Paradigm* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017).

4 K. Anders Ericsson, *Peak: Secrets from the New Science of Expertise* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016).

5 Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001),

A learning bottleneck thus presents itself, probably unbeknownst to the aforesaid imagined students and their homework. As an expert, what exactly does the instructor do to get through it? (This is the decoding part.) And can the teacher devise exercises to reinforce deeper, more appropriate reading techniques? (There is the deliberate practice.) These are deceptively difficult questions to answer or even be aware of because seasoned professionals suffer from the so-called "curse of knowledge," which blinds them to problems that non-experts face.[6]

A blunt-force approach of having students read more and more texts will not work here – in fact, it could have the unintended effect of reinforcing inadequate extant habits. So-called "coverage" courses, which operate under the assumption that history is an assembly of agreed-upon facts which students are expected to master, advocate blunt-force: Simply put, more materials and content is perceived as better for learning.[7] The frequency of the coverage approach, even at the college level, as

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especially ch. 3, "On the Reading of Historical Texts." See also Peter Burkholder, "Why You Read Like an Expert – and Why Your Students Probably Don't," *Faculty Focus* (November 17, 2014): <https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-and-learning/read-like-expert-students-probably-dont/>.

6 On the "curse," Steven Pinker, *The Sense of Style* (New York: Viking, 2014), 59. Its broader implications for teaching and learning are delineated in Nancy Schorschinsky, "Coping with the Curse of Knowledge (and Yes, You May Have It Too)," *The Teaching Professor* (September 23, 2019): <https://www.teachingprofessor.com/topics/professional-growth/reflections-on-teaching/coping-with-the-curse-of-knowledge-and-yes-you-may-have-it-too/>.

7 On coverage, see Lendol Calder, "Uncoverage: Toward a Signature Pedagogy for the History Survey," *Journal of American History* 92, no. 4 (2006), 1358-1370. On the fallacy of more content equating with increased learning, see Maryellen Weimer, *Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice*, 2nd edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013), 115. On non-experts' belief that history is primarily an assembly of facts as opposed to interpretation, see Peter Burkholder and Krista Jenkins, "What Are Our Fields About? Survey Suggests Disconnect between Professionals and the Public," *The Teaching Professor* (forthcoming, 2019).

well as its shortcomings, have been well documented.[8] The fallacy of increased reading volume resulting in better literacy skills is thus all the more true here, since cognitive psychology informs us that the most important factor in effective studying is not time-on-task, or a genuine desire to learn, or studying in a way that matches one's so-called "learning style" (in fact, researchers can find no evidence for the existence of such styles). Rather, the key to improved studying is *what one thinks about while one studies*, meaning students need a deliberate practice reading framework to approach different types of historical texts productively.[9]

Such frameworks are readily available, though they take considerable time, concentration, and practice in which to gain competence, and they must be conveyed to learners in a comprehensible and supportive fashion. One approach is for experts to model how they, as seasoned professionals, read various types of texts, demonstrating in "real time" how they make sense of them. This is the "think-aloud" protocol, developed by Sam Wineburg to catch professionals and their students in the very act of thinking – something that learners often are unaware of and rarely ever see from their instructors. The main stipulation is that, while reading any type of text aloud, the reader has to vocalize everything that comes to mind as it happens. This unveils the

8 Joel Sipress and David Voelker estimate that coverage remains popular, if not dominant, in college-level history courses in the United States; Joel M. Sipress and David J. Voelker, "From Learning History to Doing History," in *Exploring Signature Pedagogies: Approaches to Teaching Disciplinary Habits of Mind,* eds. Regan A. R. Gurung, Nancy L. Chick, and Aeron Haynie (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2009), 19-35.

9 Stephen Chew, "Helping Students Get the Most Out of Studying," in *Applying Science of Learning in Education: Infusing Psychological Science into the Curriculum,* eds. Victor Benassi, Catherine Overson, and Christopher M. Hakala (Society for the Teaching of Psychology, 2014), 215-223. See also Samford University, "How to Get the Most Out of Studying, Episode 2: 'What Students Should Know about How People Learn,'" YouTube Video, 7:14, August 16, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9O7y7XEC66M.

"mock reader," who questions, interrogates, doubts, and cross-references texts, as opposed to simply accepting their veracity and mining them for raw content. After demonstrating the process, an instructor's students can mimic it in small groups with a selected text. It can be an awkward and challenging exercise at first, but it is precisely the type of deliberate practice that, if continued over time and with helpful guidance, can lead to an appreciation for disparate types of texts, as well as their meta-content.[10] The urgency for such work is seen in recent research showing that even college-level students, untrained in targeted reading techniques, perform poorly at differentiating and analyzing historical texts and artifacts.[11]

A second protocol, which can be used in tandem with or as an alternative to the one above, is to provide students with question sets that help steer readers toward modes of thinking that are conducive to deeper understandings of texts, as well as ways to differentiate them. Such questions lay bare the heuristics – the mental shortcuts – that experts use when confronting written history. As such, they are not geared toward content, per se; rather, they revolve around three facets of analysis that Wineburg detected in experts: *sourcing* (e.g., who created the document and why; how distant the source is from the events described; reasons to suspect ulterior motives), *cross-checking* (e.g., whether other readings tell similar or different versions of events), and, in the case of primary sources, *imagining the setting* (i.e., matters pertaining to historical empathy).[12] Answering such questions methodically

10 On the think-aloud technique, see Wineburg, *Historical Thinking*, ch. 3; more recently, see Sam Wineburg, *Why Learn History (When It's Already on Your Phone)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), ch. 4.

11 Sam Wineburg, Mark Smith, and Joel Breakstone, "What Is Learned in College History Classes?" *Journal of American History* 104, no. 4 (March 2018); 983-993.

12 Question sets designed around the three headings of sourcing, cross-checking, and imagining the setting have been distributed during readings of the Advanced Placement World History exam and are reproduced in Cynthia Boyle et al., *Document-Based Assessment Activities* (Huntington Beach, CA: Shell Education, 2010), 7.

is disorienting, time-consuming, and labor-intensive for learners who, as described above, often see the field of history as one of content acquisition, not interpretation. The protocol can even challenge students' assumptions about what it means to be literate, insofar as their present skills may have served them well up to that point.[13] But the approach breaks down a complex reading process into discrete steps that are more manageable, allowing learners, with sufficient practice and feedback, to clear a critical learning bottleneck. It is precisely the sort of deliberate practice needed to bring students to a more nuanced and sophisticated appreciation of the past through textual analysis, but it may call for an altogether different approach to teaching the past.

Consistent with SoTL practices, each of two methods outlined above can then be employed to gather firm evidence about students' learning and the bottlenecks they face. Which aspect of analysis – sourcing, cross-checking, or imagining the setting – is the most challenging? If students' question set responses are coded and then quantified for frequencies, what trends appear in their answers, and how can we use them as guides to better instruction? In the case of think-alouds, one crude but telling measure is to have students time their peers' efforts, and then compare the results against the instructor's. Students are often surprised: They assume that experts analyze much more quickly than non-experts, but the opposite is more often the case – perhaps by a wide margin.[14] A simple, ongoing and quantifiable gauge of students' reading proficiencies is thus whether their think-aloud efforts become longer (and by how much) as they get more practice and feedback. And because both of these protocols require repeated efforts, they carry the added benefit of getting processes into long-

13 Ken Bain calls such challenges "expectation failures," where one's skills and frameworks for understanding collapse. See Ken Bain, *What the Best College Teachers Do* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 28.

14 On experts slowing down like this, see Wineburg, *Historical Thinking*, 69-70. My own experiments show that I usually take about three times longer to perform a think-aloud than most of my students.

term memory so that they can be used in working memory – the site where actual thinking occurs.[15]

Sharing the methods and results of such protocols is at the core of SoTL research. Moreover, by placing learning evidence about students' reading and analysis skills within the theoretical frameworks noted earlier, scholars have greater explanatory powers – just as is the case with our traditional historical research. Learning successes (or failures) thereby move from being idiosyncratic and impressionistic to carefully planned and supported by both theory and data. That is a major shift in professional practice, not unlike what we seek to instill in our students when we push them to make evidence-based arguments. Although it may require an overhaul of how we conceive of and teach our subject, it places the educational emphasis where it should be: on helping the learner acquire a deeper, more authentic understanding of the past.[16]

15 On this process, see the work of cognitive psychologist Daniel Willingham, *Why Don't Students Like School?* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 13-18.
16 This last point leads into effective course design, which is beyond the purview of this article; for a brief introduction, see Peter Burkholder, "Backward Design, Forward Progress," *Faculty Focus* (December 5, 2018): <https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/course-design-ideas/backward-design-forward-progress/>. For further discussion of matters involving the assessment of learning in history, readers would be well served by consulting Lendol Calder and Tracy Steffes, "Measuring College Learning in History," in *Improving Quality in American Higher Education: Learning Outcomes and Assessments for the 21st Century*, eds. Richard Arum, Josipa Roksa, and Amanda Cook (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 37-86.

Assessment in the History Classroom

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The growth of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning among historians is closely tied to the evolving state of assessment in history classrooms. Just a few years ago James Grossman, the executive director of the American Historical Association, referred to the term *assessment* as a "remarkably potent" "trigger word" among historians.[1] Historians have long been skeptical of what Casper and Westhoff recently described as the "assessment regime" in higher education. Yet recent years have brought growing calls from professionals in the discipline, including Grossman, to frame effective teaching as centered on individual and collective efforts to measure student learning of history.[2] While the origins and specific nature of assessment efforts differ according to settings, historians are increasingly referring to learning outcomes and seeing the value of having historians, rather than administrators or the general public, identify and articulate the nature of meaningful teaching and learning in the history classroom. The emerging Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in History (HistorySoTL) offers unique opportunities to develop discipline-specific assessments that enrich both individual courses and larger curricula.

1 James Grossman and Julia Brookins, "Assessment Is What We Make of It," *The Journal of American History* 103, no. 4 (2016): 1132-1137.
2 Scott E. Casper and Laura M. Westhoff, "Surprising Opportunities for Historians: Taking Control of the Assessment Process," *The Journal of American History* 103, no. 4 (2016): 1102-1103.

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The nature and purpose of assessment has undergone significant changes in recent decades. Older notions of assessment have focused largely on formal *summative assessments* that measure final learning through exams, research papers, and standardized tests. These summative assessments, long a staple of higher education, often serve the role of an autopsy in that learning is evaluated at the end of the semester, after instruction and student growth is completed. More recent discussions of assessment in secondary and higher education emphasize the importance of effective *formative assessments* as an integral part of evaluation, and also of the teaching and learning process. Reframing the issue as assessment *for* learning as it happens rather than the measurement *of* learning that has already occurred, historians and other instructors are exploring formal and informal ways to assess learning outcomes throughout instruction. According to Dylan Wiliam this process ideally is continual, informative, and motivates "feedback systems."[1]

One example of the application of assessment for learning is the lesson model promoted by the Instructional Skills Workshop (ISW). An intense professional development curriculum created at the University of British Columbia, the ISW model involves lessons that, regardless of discipline or length, require explicit outcomes, a pre-assessment, participatory student learning, and a post-assessment. Participants invariably find the ISW workshops to be powerful experiences precisely because formative assessments are central to effective instruction.[2] The result of the ISW and other efforts has been that assessment moves from the periphery of education to an essential ingredient in decisions about classroom instruction and student learning.

Within the discipline of history, engagement with assessment

1 Dylan Wiliam, "What is Assessment for Learning?" *Studies in Educational Evaluation* 37 (2011): 3-14.

2 Instructional Skills Workshop for Faculty, https://ctlt.ubc.ca/programs/all-our-programs/instructional-skills-workshop-isw/

(both formative and summative) among instructors has recently shifted toward explicit efforts to measure discipline-specific skills. Research in recent decades suggests a persistent gap between the perceptions and cognitive skills of historians and the approaches of secondary and college students.[3] As a result, creating and employing assessments that allow historians to effectively measure the discipline-specific skills and concepts necessary for studying history is not only crucial to instruction, it is also central to shaping and defending the precise role of the discipline in larger educational and cultural debates. A basic misunderstanding by the public of what historical study entails and its impact on teaching and learning at the college level are what prompted the History Department at the University of Colorado Boulder (CU) to create the History Teaching and Learning Project (HTLP). HTLP was a two-year endeavor focused primarily on developing department-wide student learning objectives (SLOs) that clearly articulated the discipline-specific skills and concepts students could expect to learn in CU history courses. Significantly, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in History was central to this task. After interviewing the faculty and reading their syllabi in order to identify the common ideas in learning goals held across the department, project lead Natalie Mendoza used HistorySoTL to develop a language and coherent organization of what came to be the SLOs. Mendoza also introduced HistorySoTL to the department as a tool for designing and teaching courses and assessing student learning. The HTLP Working Group, for example, was a volunteer group of faculty and grad students that read and discussed HistorySoTL. In the second year of HTLP,

3 Richard Hughes, "Encountering History and History Instruction: Perceptions of Emerging Teachers," SoTL Commons Conference: A Conference of Teaching and Learning, Savannah, Georgia, 2019; Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001); Bruce A. VanSledright, *The Challenge of Rethinking History Education: On Practices, Theories, and Policy* (New York: Routledge Publishing, 2011).

the Working Group paid particular attention to the practice of scholarly teaching: Members approached their teaching as a site of intellectual inquiry and used HistorySoTL to explore a problem in their teaching. This exercise led Working Group members to change their teaching in a range of ways, from clarifying learning goals to developing new active learning strategies to re-evaluating the assessments they currently used in their courses.[4] As for the rest of the department, the HTLP Workshop & Discussion events featured HistorySoTL scholars, such as Lendol Calder, David Pace, Leah Shopkow, and Laura Westhoff, who shared their research with faculty and graduate students. These expert guest presentations served as a preface to a workshop period in which the audience discussed how the HistorySoTL research it just learned about could be applied in their own classrooms. After two years of active support and focus, the CU History Department continues the work it began with HTLP—including its reliance on HistorySoTL—to now consider teaching practices and assessments that best align with the SLOs, to re-evaluate its major pathway options and course sequencing, and to cultivate a culture of scholarly teaching that it views as critical to sustaining the important pedagogical gains the department made in the previous two years.[5] In HTLP, we get a glimpse of how historians can begin to think about assessment, learning objectives, and teaching methods as part of a vertically aligned curriculum. Importantly, this curricular vision extends across a department's course offerings and not just through the individual courses we teach.

4 The idea for scholarly teaching in the Working Group was inspired by the collaborative work Mendoza had done with David Pace and Laura Westhoff as members of an *ad hoc* committee for the American Historical Association on defining HistorySoTL and how the discipline might engage it. The statement that came from that work, "Guidelines for the Incorporation of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in the Work of the History Profession," can be found at: https://www.historians.org/jobs-and-professional-development/statements-standards-and-guidelines-of-the-discipline/guidelines-for-the-incorporation-of-the-scholarship-of-teaching-and-learning-in-the-work-of-the-history-profession.

5 https://www.colorado.edu/history/history-teaching-and-learning-project.

Efforts such as HTLP in Colorado did not appear very likely only a decade ago. Two articles in the *Journal of American History* in the last fifteen years serve as a useful barometer for the changing state of assessment among historians over the period. Richard Rothstein's 2004 essay, "We Are Not Ready to Assess History Performance," framed the challenges of assessment largely in terms of curriculum and the negative impact of enduring political and ideological factors. In contrast, a 2016 article by Scott Casper and Laura Westhoff entitled, "Surprising Opportunities for Historians: Taking Control of the Assessment Process," suggested that a new promising climate of assessment had emerged that focused less on intractable curriculum debates than newer efforts to "identify key areas of competency and skill" within the discipline. Indeed, the ability of historians such as those involved with HTLP to articulate a discipline-specific pedagogy and to assess the ability of students to read, think, and communicate like historians has become a powerful avenue in recent years for defending the discipline and, more generally, the liberal arts.[6]

Furthermore, while projects have increasingly embraced assessment as an invaluable instrument to improve classroom instruction, some discussions of assessment among historians

6 Richard Rothstein, "We Are Not Ready to Assess History Performance," *The Journal of American History* 90, no. 4 (2004): 1381-1391; Casper and Westhoff, 1103. Other examples include Gary Kornblith and Carol Lasser, "'Will That Be on the Exam?' The Role of Testing in Teaching and Learning American History," *The Journal of American History* 90, no. 4 (2004): 1379-1380; Timothy A. Hacsi, "Document-Based Question: What Is the Historical Significance of the Advanced Placement Test?" *The Journal of American History* 90, no. 4 (2004): 1392–1400; David Pace, "Assessment in History: The Case for 'Decoding' the Discipline," *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 11, no. 3 (2011): 107-119; Gary Kroll, Jessamyn Neuhaus, and Wendy Gorden, "Slouching Toward Student-Centered Assessment," *The Journal of American History* 102, no. 4 (2016): 1108–1122; Jeffrey McClurken and Krystyn Moon, "Making Assessment Work for You," *The Journal of American History* 102, no. 4 (2016): 1123-1131. See also the seminal work of the Stanford History Education Group, specifically the *Beyond the Bubble* project and the development of History Assessments of Thinking (HATs), https://sheg.stanford.edu/history-assessments.

perceive such efforts as only a partial solution. From this perspective, what is needed are innovative assessments that promote a new epistemological architecture for how we teach history – instructional strategies and a larger curriculum that promote and measure students' disciplinary understandings rather than simply the historical content or facts so often assumed to be the primary objective of history education. For these instructors, assessment has evolved further from an attractive teaching tool to part of a larger teaching paradigm that reframes the nature and purpose of the history classroom toward inquiry and the cognitive skills of historians.[7] Not surprisingly, different priorities in terms of student learning demand different assessments and, whether the focus is improving specific instruction or reconceptualizing the history curriculum, the questions and evidence that drive SoTL research are invaluable for historians as they seek to make better decisions about what goes on in the history classroom.

7 Sam Wineburg, Mark Smith, and Joel Breakstone, "What Is Learned in College History Classes?" *The Journal of American History* 104, no. 4 (2018): 983-993; Lendol Calder and Tracy Steffes, "Measuring College Learning in History," in *Improving Quality in American Higher Education: Learning Outcomes and Assessments for the 21st Century*, eds. Richard Arum, Josipa Roksa, and Amanda Cook (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 37-86; Bruce A. VanSledright, *Assessing Historical Thinking and Understanding: Innovative Designs for New Standards* (New York: Routledge: 2014); Lendol Calder, "Uncoverage: Toward a Signature Pedagogy for the History Survey," *The Journal of American History* 92, no. 4 (2006): 1358-1370; Joan Middendorf and Leah Shopkow, *Overcoming Student Learning Bottlenecks* (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2017); David Pace, *The Decoding the Disciplines Paradigm: Seven Steps to Increased Student Learning* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2018); http://decodingthedisciplines.org/.

Book Reviews

David A. Bell. *Napoleon: A Concise Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp 139. $18.95.

David Bell quips that among historians Napoleon is a "heavy" rather than "cottage" industry (125). Indeed, since 2000 alone numerous excellent biographies of this world historical figure have appeared in English, which prompts the question: why another one? The answer lies in Bell's subtitle. Unlike other works that run to many hundreds of pages if not multiple volumes, this svelte study performs its work in 113 lively pages. As a renowned revolutionary-era historian at Princeton University as well as a public intellectual whose essays and reviews appear in *The New Republic*, Bell possesses unsurpassed credentials to deliver on his goal of providing "an accurate, readable portrait of Napoleon that incorporates the results of recent scholarship but is also concise and is accessible to those without specialized knowledge" (x).

Bell's work will become indispensible not only for the undergraduate classroom and advanced secondary students but also for non-specialist instructors assigned to teach lessons on the Napoleonic period. It is both admirably thorough despite its concision as well as a pleasure to read thanks to the author's talent as a story-teller and writer. All major events and themes receive due attention, as Bell chronicles Napoleon's astounding career from the early years as an ambitious Corsican and French revolutionary general—wildly successful in Italy, less so in Egypt—to his ascension as First Consul in 1799 and then reign as Emperor from 1804 to 1815. Somehow, a short work about a complex figure never feels rushed, and Bell's knack for the intriguing anecdote serves the dual purpose of engaging the reader while reinforcing central themes. For example, the opening scene about the dramatic "encounter at Laffrey" in 1815, at which Napoleon, having escaped from his exile on Elba, confronts and wins over Louis XVIII's soldiers during the Hundred Days, exemplifies for Bell the "stage management" (4) that is critical to an understanding of Napoleon's

career and subsequent legacy.

Already valuable as accurate and captivating biography, this study simultaneously offers an important interpretation of the Napoleonic phenomenon. Drawing on insights from his 2007 work, *The First Total War,* Bell demonstrates convincingly how the political upheaval of the French Revolution and accompanying transformations in the nature of warfare provided the indispensible context for a talented and ambitious Corsican to become a significant French general by age 26 and "the new Caesar" (25) before age 30. Bell's depiction of Napoleon's complex relationship with the French Revolution—the man whose rise stemmed from the Revolution and who in 1804 claimed "I am the French Revolution" both incarnated and undermined revolutionary principles—is one masterful element of a masterful book.

Nonspecialist readers will especially benefit from the epilogue in which Bell first assesses Napoleon's legacy among the general public and historians from 1815 to the present and then concludes with his own judicious evaluation of that legacy. In the end, Bell acknowledges Napoleon's political and military genius and comprehends the reasons why subsequent generations have remained fascinated with the "sense of sheer human possibility" (113) that Napoleon's life represented. At the same time, and while correctly rejecting any false analogy with twentieth-century dictators, Bell expresses sympathy with the school of historical thought critical of Napoleon: "The reestablishment of slavery, the endless slaughter on the battlefields, the authoritarian rule, the imperial ventures [in Haiti and Egypt] all make for a damning and lengthy indictment" (112). Throughout the biography, however, Bell focuses on understanding his subject rather than prosecuting him.

It is neither a surprise nor a criticism to suggest that, in a brief book about a monumental life, concision exacts an occasional cost, such as in the following instance: on page 55 we learn that Napoleon and Pope Pius VII negotiated a Condordat in 1801;

the pontiff's attendance at the Emperor's coronation ceremony in 1804 is noted on page 61; we next encounter Pius VII on page 81, after unexplained clashes with Napoleon have led to the pope's imprisonment in French territory. Bell simply does not have space to follow all the twists and turns in, and provide context for, the tumultuous relations between the papacy and Napoleon from 1796 to 1815. To explore this and other topics in greater depth, readers can consult the endnotes and guide to further reading—useful resources that provide yet one additional reason to recommend this book enthusiastically to university and high school students.

Illinois State University Anthony Crubaugh

Jane Ziegelman and Andrew Coe. *A Square Meal: A Culinary History of the Great Depression*. New York: Harper, 2016. Pp. 314. $15.99.

A Square Meal is a highly entertaining book tackling the food history of the Great Depression. In it, the authors have combined many threads of the story: how nutritionists thought Americans should eat in the face of economic collapse; how families faced with shortages actually ate; and how politicians thought about and inadequately addressed the problem of hunger. The authors put their work into a larger historical context, examining how World War I changed the government's and the public's approach to food, as well as American food traditions in the years leading up to the Depression.

The authors begin with World War I and the food lessons generated by that conflict. They also spend a significant amount of time discussing food in both Herbert Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt's White Houses, making clear that food took on contrasting political meanings in each. In the Hoover White House, opulent dining was meant to signify that the Depression was temporary and business as usual should dominate. The frugal,

scientifically formulated meals the Roosevelts ate and inflicted on their guests reflected Eleanor Roosevelt's solidarity with the poor and malnourished and her desire to promote progressive and scientific ideas about food, even if the results could be ghastly. The authors do a good job of explaining the meals families ate, born of hardship, and the inadequacies of the government's food programs. Social policy played tug of war with agricultural policy, and nutritionists strived, but failed, to really understand the depths of the hunger problem they faced. While the federal government worked hard to sell the casserole, white sauce, and other sturdy meals to a needy populace, many families lacked even the most basic of foods. Relief programs never provided adequately for everyone who was hungry. The solution to the problems of a hungry nation would come with the full employment of World War II.

A Square Meal is entertaining, and well written. It is, however, not entirely satisfactory from a scholarly point of view. The most serious problem with the book is a general lack of documentation. The authors provide citations for some materials, but not others, leaving the reader to wonder if what they have written is as carefully researched as it seems. Case in point is the story of the Dust Bowl. The authors do note that the vast majority of Dust Bowl residents stuck it out on the Great Plains, rather than migrating to California, Oregon, or other points west. The authors, however, seem to betray a lack of research by jumping almost immediately to the migrant story, in which they lean heavily on the *Grapes of Wrath*, which firstly is fictional, and secondly is not a Dust Bowl story. There was a Dust Bowl story they could have told, and told by reference to good secondary materials, but it simply is not in the text. In another spot (236), the authors claim that the federal government paid farmers to mechanize both the cotton and the wheat harvests, which is completely untrue. The cotton harvest waited for mechanization until the post-World War II period, and neither its, nor wheat's, mechanization was paid for by the

government. Farmers bought their own equipment. There is also a bit of flatness to the Midwestern farm story as presented, which does not acknowledge severe droughts in 1934 and 1936, and the challenges of feeding a family when farm commodities have lost most of their value. Problems such as these make me wonder what other lurking errors are in the text, waiting to be discovered by specialists in other areas of history.

This is an easily read book, filled with numerous good stories and interesting information. The authors have made the sad topic of food in the Great Depression lively. Given some of the problems with the research, I am not sure that I would assign it as a whole to an undergraduate food history class. I might pick and choose chapters to assign, based on my level of comfort that the research behind their story was sound. The book does provide some very good leads to primary source materials, many of which could themselves be used to write lectures or assigned as reading materials for undergraduates. In other words, this book is a useful resource, even if I am not sold on it as completely accurate history.

Iowa State University Pamela Riney-Kehrberg

Verónica Castillo-Muñoz, *The Other California: Land, Identity, and Politics on the Mexican Borderlands*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2017. Pp. 171. $70.

In *The Other California: Land, Identity, and Politics on the Mexican Borderlands*, Verónica Castillo-Muñoz makes a convincing case for understanding the development of the U.S./Mexican borderlands at the grassroots level. Emphasizing how "governments, foreign investors, and local communities engaged in the making of the Baja California borderlands" from 1850-1954 (2), Castillo-Muñoz creates a rich portrait of a region in which, well into the twentieth century, control over land and resources

was far from settled. The major characters in this story—the Colorado River Land Company, Chinese immigrants and their Asian-Mexican families, Indigenous Cocopah villagers, mestizo migrants, and displaced Californios—competed for access to the land and water that made Baja a surprisingly productive agricultural region. Her interpretation of Baja's history in this period is important to understanding the unique development of the region and is also a fascinating contribution to the field of borderlands history that challenges the notion that along the U.S./Mexico border, the borderlands dynamic characterized by fluidity, contested economic and political control, and increased opportunities for otherwise marginal actors to carve out influential niches gave way to state control and rigid borders in the nineteenth century. In Baja California, as Castillo-Muñoz has shown, that borderlands dynamic persisted deep into the twentieth century.

One of the greatest strengths of Castillo-Muñoz's book is her creative and fine-grained research, including careful attention to Baja's census data from the era under study. By examining mestizo migrants, indigenous households, and Chinese immigrant settlement patterns, she is able to challenge the stereotypes of migrant and immigrant "birds of passage" that have painted a skewed picture of life at the household level for Baja California-bound migrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Instead, Castillo-Muñoz's research reveals extensive intermarriage between mestizo men and indigenous women as well as Chinese men and mestizo women, producing "one of the most diverse communities in northern Mexico" (108). Though in many cases these borderlands actors would struggle against each other as much as they struggled against the powerful forces of capitalist transformation and state control, their insistence on local control of everything from labor activism to land reform shaped a distinct borderlands culture in Baja that profoundly shaped the economic and cultural development of the region.

Castillo-Muñoz is firmly in step with the current patterns in

California historiography which have emphasized the importance of indigenous communities in shaping local economic and political development. Here the Mexicali Valley is no different. Indigenous Cocopah communities incorporated Mestizo and Chinese newcomers into the region through intermarriage and economic cooperation. Through organized political action, Cocopah communities pressed the revolutionary government for effective land redistribution that met the specific needs of Cocopah families, based on Cocopah gendered divisions of labor. Perhaps most interestingly, Castillo-Muñoz highlights the ways Cocopah activists seized the opportunity presented by the Mexican Revolution and the Magonista uprising to push for land redistribution. Joining forces with a multiracial coalition of Wobblies, working class mestizos, and indigenous Paipai and Kiliwa activists, the Cocopah and their allies struck significant fear into the Diaz regime and kept the flame of labor radicalism and land redistribution alive into the postrevolutionary era and culminated in the 1920 Law of Ejidos (communal landholdings) that disproportionately benefited indigenous petitioners. Under consistent pressure from indigenous communities, revolutionary era land reform efforts bore significant fruit in Baja California in the 1920s.

The Other California absolutely belongs in an undergraduate classroom. Veteran teachers of California, Western, and Borderlands history courses at the undergraduate level will appreciate its manageable length and accessible style. The book is approachable and appropriate for undergraduates. Its regional emphasis suggests a fruitful discussion of how Baja California's history intersects with Alta California's (immigration, Chinese exclusion and marginalization, the labor movement) and how, for some borderlands actors, such as land companies and wealthy landowners, the U.S./Mexico border was extremely fluid and Baja California became an extension of Alta California's economic opportunities (and vice-

versa) for both rich and poor when circumstances dictated. *The Other California* is also a fine example of the concerns and methodologies of Borderlands history and would be a welcome addition to historiography or historical methodologies courses.

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