



# Teaching History

---

A Journal of Methods

Volume 46 • No. 2 • Fall 2021

# TEACHING HISTORY: A JOURNAL OF METHODS

[openjournals.bsu.edu/teachinghistory](http://openjournals.bsu.edu/teachinghistory)

**Editor:** Sarah Drake Brown, National Council for History Education

**Assistant Editor/Book Reviews Editor:** Richard Hughes, Illinois State University

## **Editorial Board**

Brian Anton, Purdy R-II Schools, Missouri

Thomas Armstrong, Former President, Georgia Association of Historians

Charles Banner-Haley, Colgate University

Greta Bucher, United States Military Academy

C. David Dalton, College of the Ozarks

Elizabeth Lawrence, Augustana College

William Muggleston, Retired Historian

Laura Musselwhite, University of New Mexico at Valencia

Philip Nicolosi, West Morris Central High School, New Jersey

Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, Iowa State University

Randi Storch, SUNY Cortland

## **Advisory Board**

Mark Konnert, University of Calgary

Oscar Larsen, University of North Carolina-Charlotte

Jodie Mader, University of Cincinnati

Ralph Menning, Kent State University at Stark

Russell Olwell, Merrimack College

R.B. Rosenburg, Clayton State University

Raymond Screws, Arkansas National Guard Museum

Julie Anne Taylor, University of Michigan-Dearborn

Additional support from Ball State University Libraries

## **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.

Visit the website to submit a manuscript or to contact the editors. Authors retain copyright to their contributions but agree to license published content under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivates 4.0 License. **ISSN 0730-1383**

## Volume 46 | No. 2 | Fall 2021

FROM THE EDITOR	2
Sarah Drake Brown, National Council for History Education	
<b>Articles</b>	
STAGE LEFT AND RIGHT: MODELING CIVIL DISCOURSE IN THE CLASSROOM THROUGH FICTIONAL PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES BETWEEN FDR AND REAGAN	3
Mark Boulton, Westminster College Tobias T. Gibson, Westminster College	
OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES IN HISTORY: A STATE-OF-THE-FIELD ESSAY	12
Katherine Foshko Tsan, Baruch College-CUNY	
TEACHING JACOBITISM FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY	20
Kirsteen M. MacKenzie, Professional Historian	
<b>Special Section</b>	
<i>TEACHING HISTORY FORUM: HISTORY WARS AND THE AMERICAN HISTORY SURVEY</i>	
INTRODUCTION	28
Andrew Hartman, Illinois State University	
THE 1619 PROJECT AND THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND ARGUMENTATION IN THE HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSROOM	30
Andrew Erford, Bloomington High School, Bloomington, Illinois	
1968: A THEMATIC INQUIRY	35
Chad Kuehnl, Fieldcrest High School, Minonk, Illinois	
PROTEST AS AN AMERICAN TRADITION: NARRATIVE DISCOURSE IN THE AMERICAN HISTORY SURVEY	41
Kelly Schrems, Bloomington High School, Bloomington, Illinois	
CHARTING THE PRESENT OF TEACHING THE PAST: PROPAGANDA AND 1776 IN THE HISTORY CLASSROOM	45
Hunter Watts, Normal Community High School, Normal, Illinois	
SAVING AMERICAN HISTORY	49
Cameron Zindars, Mahomet-Seymour High School, Mahomet, Illinois	
<b>Book Reviews</b>	
Znamenski. <i>Socialism as a Secular Creed: A Modern Global History</i>	53
Scott C.M. Bailey, Kansai Gaidai University	
Eaton. <i>World History Through Case Studies: Historical Skills in Practice</i>	54
Michael Clinton, Gwynedd Mercy University	
Weitz. <i>A World Divided: The Global Struggle for Human Rights in the Age of Nation-States</i>	56
Benjamin Harris, College of Western Idaho	
Snyder-Grenier. <i>The House on Henry Street: The Enduring Life of a Lower East Side Settlement</i>	57
Eliza Martin, Georgia State University	
Menand. <i>The Free World: Art and Thought in the Cold War</i>	58
Amy Louise Wood, Illinois State University	

## FROM THE EDITOR

---

It is crucial for history teachers—from elementary schools through universities—to have a community to which they can turn, sharing excitement and frustration, success and challenges. We need a space where we can gain new insights, pose questions, and work through ideas. For forty-seven years, *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods* has served as one such community. Steve Kneeshaw founded the journal in 1975 with Loren Pennington and Philip Reed Rulon, with Steve serving as the editor from its first issue in 1976 until his retirement in 2015. I have had the honor and privilege of editing *Teaching History* for the past six years, and I have enjoyed and learned from the completion of each issue. Volume 46 is my last as editor. I am pleased to announce that Dr. Jessamyn Neuhaus will take over editorial leadership beginning with Volume 47.

A professor of United States history and popular culture at SUNY Plattsburgh, Jessamyn epitomizes the type of historian for which this journal exists. She is the author of two monographs and a scholar of teaching and learning; she makes teaching a central focus in her research and commits publicly to entering conversations about teaching history at different levels. I look forward to reading what *Teaching History* will bring us under her leadership.

In addition to a new editor in 2022, *Teaching History* will shift its format slightly in the new year. Under Jessamyn's leadership, the journal will publish annually in the fall, beginning in 2022. She and I believe that this new format will enable the journal to maintain the high standards and quality that readers expect. I am confident that Jessamyn will find at *Teaching History* scholarly contributors, dedicated reviewers, and a supportive editorial board, just as I have experienced over the past six years.

The board at *Teaching History* is unique; several individuals have been with the journal practically since its inception. Regardless of their time serving this publication, each member has exhibited dedication and professionalism, and I am grateful for having had the opportunity to work with them. I must extend special thanks to editorial board members Tom Armstrong, David Dalton, and Pamela Riney-Kehrberg. Publishing a journal involves the work of many people, and Chris Lovett and Jacque Fehr at Emporia State University provided me with guidance and good humor prior to their respective retirements in 2020. I thank them both for their dedication to the journal. I also thank Micah Gjeltema, Open Content and Digital Publishing Librarian at Ball State University Libraries. The journal literally could not be published without Micah's support and his patience. And most importantly, I thank Richard Hughes, assistant editor, book review editor, and my good friend. The majority of the special sections we have published in *Teaching History* over the past six years are works of Richard's creation. I thank him for his scholarly ideas, his enthusiasm, and his friendship.

I first encountered *Teaching History* in the 1990s when my father, a historian and history teacher educator, recommended that I read the journal. I look forward to continuing to read *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods* for ideas and inspiration from scholarly teachers.

Sarah Drake Brown  
Editor, *Teaching History*

# STAGE LEFT AND RIGHT: MODELING CIVIL DISCOURSE IN THE CLASSROOM THROUGH FICTIONAL PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES BETWEEN FDR AND REAGAN

Mark Boulton

Westminster College

Tobias T. Gibson

Westminster College

Teaching History 46(2)

DOI: 10.33043/TH.46.2.3-11

© 2021 Boulton & Gibson.

Distributed with [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

As previous eras of social unrest and political upheaval have demonstrated, a polarized body politic is far from being a new phenomenon in U.S. history. However, the resurgent populism of the early twenty-first century, fueled by the information bubbles and feedback loops of social media and an increasingly partisan press, is driving the nation toward evermore dangerous levels of rancor. Insults, violent rhetoric, and misinformation are present in all levels of government. A 2019 Pew Research Center poll found that a significant majority of Americans considered that political debate had become “more negative in recent years [85%] ... less respectful [85%], less fact-based [76%] and less substantive [60%].” Half of the respondents argued that discussing politics with anyone with an opposing viewpoint had become “stressful and frustrating.”<sup>1</sup> The dominance of the two-party system exacerbates the tribal nature of this division whereby, “Race, religion and ideology now align with partisan identity in ways that they often didn’t in eras when the two parties were relatively heterogenous coalitions.”<sup>2</sup> The consequences of this acrimony go far beyond the familial strife of an awkward Thanksgiving dinner conversation.

Increasing numbers of Americans now believe that those who do not share their beliefs pose an existential threat to the nation. Stripped of a unifying external danger such as that once posed by global communism, the new enemy is internal: It is fellow Americans. One month before the 2020 presidential election, a poll of over 10,000 registered voters revealed that 90% of challenger Joseph R. Biden’s supporters and 89% of incumbent Donald Trump supporters believed that the election of the opposing candidate “would lead to lasting harm to the nation.”<sup>3</sup> These divisions threaten to undermine any sense of a common identity or unifying core value system and, if left unchecked, the consequences on the nation’s future could be dire. Higher education has an essential role to play in arresting this decline.

Colleges and universities have the opportunity to nurture informed citizens capable of rational dialogue and empathy to opposing viewpoints. Classroom and extracurricular activities can model respectful political conversation in a way that can bridge the expanding chasms in our society. That is the goal of a class we teach at Westminster College titled, “FDR and Reagan: What the Greatest Presidential Debate in History Can Teach Us About American Politics ... and How We Can All Get Along.” The course—which we have now taught twice—uses the speeches and writings of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan as the basis for students to perform a series of fictional presidential debates between these two giants of American politics. This approach allows students to conduct deep research on each president and to immerse themselves fully in each president’s vision for the nation. By inhabiting the character of each leader, they are able to understand the value of political compromise, purposeful bipartisanship, and rhetoric that can both persuade and inspire. As civic educators, our primary purpose with this project is to illustrate and model to our students that respectful political discourse is both possible and essential for the vitality of the republic.

FDR and Reagan inadvertently laid the foundations for the modern acrimonious debates between liberals and conservatives. Following his election in 1932, FDR’s New Deal response to the Great Depression created the blueprint for an activist federal government. His contemporary supporters and most modern-day liberals accept

---

<sup>1</sup> “Public Highly Critical of State of Political Discourse in the U.S.,” <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/06/19/public-highly-critical-of-state-of-political-discourse-in-the-u-s/>

<sup>2</sup> Michael Dimock and Richard Wike, “America is Exceptional in the Nature of its Political Divide,” <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/11/13/america-is-exceptional-in-the-nature-of-its-political-divide/>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

and encourage the government to intervene and manage society in order to correct social and economic ills. When Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980, he sought to arrest and ultimately reverse the growth of government by cutting taxation and regulation and devolving power back to state and local authorities. His maxim that “The *nine most terrifying words* in the English language are: I’m from the Government, and I’m here to help” remains a mantra of modern conservatism.<sup>4</sup> Both are considered transformative presidents because they used moments of crisis—the Depression in the 1930s, the economic downturns and societal malaise of the 1970s—to fundamentally alter the political course of the nation.

Despite their divergent political views, both FDR and Reagan were able to persuade the American electorate that their vision represented the best path forward for the nation. Their election victories—especially for their second terms—were among the largest in the twentieth century: FDR won fifty-seven percent of the popular vote in 1932, sixty-one percent in 1936, fifty-five percent in 1940, and fifty-three percent in 1944; Reagan won fifty-one percent of the popular vote in 1980 and fifty-nine percent in 1984. Both used calm and reassuring rhetoric to convince the public of their vision. Both had their detractors, but FDR’s speeches and Fireside Chats and the words which earned Reagan the moniker of “The Great Communicator” modeled how a president can persuade political opponents in a way that was both hopeful and inclusive. Getting our students to inhabit this world is a step toward encouraging them to emulate it.

The dual methods of role-playing and debate offered by our FDR and Reagan course provide a highly effective active-learning mode of instruction. While students often “see themselves as empty buckets being filled with data by their professors,” the sage-on-the-stage method of teaching is long outdated.<sup>5</sup> Multiple studies show the greater effectiveness of creative learning options such as debate, role-playing, group work, and simulations, in addition to varied forms of content delivery such as flipped classrooms. The Model Arab League, for example, puts students “in the shoes of real-life Arab diplomats and other foreign affairs practitioners” so that “students come to realize unavoidably and inevitably how different these realities of international relations are in comparison to what they previously thought and wrongly assumed to be true.”<sup>6</sup> The critical analysis provided by such methods, rather than mere knowledge accumulation, enhances retention as well as interest in the subject matter.<sup>7</sup>

## Examples of Creative Learning in History Classrooms

To expand on one example of role-playing, John Fliter, at Kansas State University, requires an analysis paper that scrutinizes a Supreme Court justice and his or her jurisprudence. This paper then forms the basis for a student portraying that justice during a case. Fliter assigns foundational readings which discuss the importance and manner of oral arguments on the Supreme Court. Students who serve as the “lawyers” for the oral argument simulation are responsible for preparing a brief, based on real examples of legal briefs, in time to allow the justices to prepare for a performed oral argument. The oral arguments take place in a special room, not the regular classroom, as Fliter discovered that his students are “more engaged and enthusiastic” when the arguments are held outside of the class’s regular confines.

Importantly, rather than following the usual model of the Supreme Court, Fliter requires all members

<sup>4</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Reagan Quotes and Speeches,” August 12, 1986, Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute, <https://www.reaganfoundation.org/ronald-reagan/reagan-quotes-speeches/news-conference-1/>

<sup>5</sup> John C. Bean, *Engaging Ideas: The Professor’s Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass: 2001), 18.

<sup>6</sup> “About the Program,” Model Arab League, <https://ncusar.org/modelarableague/about-model-arab-league/about/>

<sup>7</sup> John Fliter, “Incorporating a Sophisticated Supreme Court Simulation into an Undergraduate Constitutional Law Class,” *Journal of Political Science Education* 5, no. 1 (2009): 12-26; Susan Engel, Josh Pallas, and Sarah Lambert, “Model United Nations and Deep Learning: Theoretical and Professional Learning,” *Journal of Political Science Education* 13, no. 2 (2017): 171-184; Stephen R. Bates and Laura Jenkins, “Teaching and Learning Ontology and Epistemology in Political Science,” *Politics* 27, no. 1 (2007): 55-63; Jamie L. Jensen, Tyler A. Kummer, and Patricia D. d. M. Godoy, “Improvements from a Flipped Classroom May Simply Be the Fruits of Active Learning,” *CBE—Life Sciences Education* 14, no. 1 (March 2015): 1-12.



of the “court” to write an opinion following oral arguments. They “are encouraged to find and read several real Supreme Court opinions in order to get a sense of the structure and style of Court opinions.”<sup>8</sup> It is clear, then, that although the oral argument is the cornerstone of the class, a great deal of preparation prior to the presentation is necessary, and each student “justice” is required to produce a document after the student lawyers have (literally) made their best case. The active-learning methods discussed above afforded students the benefits of deep learning through iterative, active, and interactive learning projects.

Jeffrey Lantis and others have written on the efficacy of student debates as a method of providing students with “a deeper understanding of (and empathy for) ... ethical complexities.”<sup>9</sup> In his analysis of his students’ foreign policy debates, he reports “a discernable shift ... toward a more nuanced understanding of the advantages and disadvantages” of complex policy choices. Structured debate, he notes, requires “students to define and defend policy positions that are assigned in advance. In this way, debates demand a level of personal engagement in the process, a measure of group collaboration on debate points, and a willingness to participate in a critical dialogue with the larger group about theoretically significant policy questions.”<sup>10</sup>

Our classroom debates are over complex policy spaces—but are also intended to ask students “to walk a mile” in the shoes of political party ideologues with which they may not identify. As will be illustrated below, at minimum, the debate structure diminished the negative stereotyping of the political “other” in our students. This is not a surprising outcome, because previous literature suggests that when students debate positions contrary to their preferences, they can—and often do—change their mind.<sup>11</sup> This is the kind of learning experience we sought for our students in the FDR and Reagan class.

## Classroom Context and Implementation

Westminster College is a small liberal arts college with relatively small class sizes and an engaged student body. While this environment certainly provides a fertile ground for teaching a class in this method, we believe the model is widely applicable. We first taught the class in the spring of 2018 with ten students as part of our Honors Program curriculum. This is an important point, because while these students were highly motivated, hard-working, and intelligent, only one was a Political Science or History major. Thus, while most of our college’s students are not knowledgeable about either FDR or Reagan, our starting point with this class was behind that of the average student in our major classes. The second iteration taught in the spring of 2019 had twenty-two students, mostly juniors and seniors and with a majority being Political Science and History majors. Thus, the second class was advantaged in that each student was much more versed in the nuances of politics, policy, and historical development. We followed the same approximate model of instruction for both classes, with some ameliorations to accommodate the different class sizes and different base knowledge levels.

To begin each class, we gave the students an overview of the historical importance of FDR and Reagan interspersed with short film clips of each president’s speeches. This got them engaged with and interested in the style and substance of FDR and Reagan’s leadership. Then we asked students to write up some of the negative stereotypes about liberalism and conservatism on the whiteboard. We emphasized that we did not want *their* opinions but wanted to analyze what is out there in the darker recesses of social media. We had the predictable—and all too depressing—results of liberalism being “soft on crime,” “godless,” “leeches,” “America hating,” “lazy,” “entitled,” and “elitist.” Conservatives were “greedy,” “racist,” “anti-science,” “homophobic,” and “rural.” When we asked about the positive sides of each, these negative stereotypes were flipped so, for example, conservatives “love America,” “love God,” and “love freedom,” while liberals were “tolerant,” “more rational,” and “compassionate.”

---

<sup>8</sup> Fliter, “Supreme Court Simulation,” 18-19.

<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey S. Lantis, “Ethics and Foreign Policy: Structured Debates for the International Studies Classroom,” *International Studies Perspectives* 5 (2004), 117–133; 128.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>11</sup> Ruth Kennedy, “In-Class Debates: Fertile Ground for Active Learning and the Cultivation of Critical Thinking and Oral Communication Skills,” *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* 19, no. 2 (2007): 183-190.

We believe it was important to air these views so that we could find a way to move beyond them. We began this process by collectively analyzing a set of common readings.

We began with some introductory readings on the nature of liberalism and conservatism. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* entries on the subjects were effective and available online.<sup>12</sup> These readings allowed us to establish a framework from which students were encouraged to understand that both philosophies want what is best for the nation, they just seek different paths to achieving it. This attempt at promoting empathy for diverse viewpoints was the first step toward mutual understanding. We then moved on to short, easy-to-read biographies on each president as a way to explore how each man embodied liberal and conservative principles. In the first iteration of the class, we read Roy Jenkins's biography, *Franklin Delano Roosevelt* and then Jacob Weisberg's *Ronald Reagan* from Times Books' American Presidents series.<sup>13</sup> The hope was that these short (both under 200 pages), accessible books would provide nearly equal treatment on each subject. Weisberg's is an excellent text; however, both of us, and most of the students, found Jenkins's treatment of FDR to be underwhelming.

Thus, in the second iteration of the class, we changed to the Bedford Series in History and Culture, with Richard Polenberg's *The Era of Franklin Delano Roosevelt* and Meg Jacobs and Julian Zelizer's *Conservatives in Power: The Reagan Years, 1981-1989*.<sup>14</sup> These works served our purposes better for three reasons: First, they offered detailed, but brief, biographies of the presidents (under 50 pages); second, they were of similar quality, which means that the students did not favor one president over the other based on the quality of the text; third, and importantly, both books included pivotal primary sources, including candidate and presidential speeches, allied politicians in the executive and legislative branches, contemporary criticisms and critiques, and first-hand accounts of the successes and failures of policy implementation for both presidents. In short, we found that these books served as richer and more detailed introductions into the subjects of the debates.

With this foundational knowledge, we examined the more densely academic *FDR and Reagan: Transformative Presidents with Clashing Visions*, by John Sloan.<sup>15</sup> Sloan superbly details theories of presidential power using Stephen Skowronek's well-respected model of presidential power. This model focuses largely on the political environment, or where a presidency exists, in a political cycle. Sloan makes a strong argument throughout that both FDR and Reagan were transformative presidents which, by highlighting their historical importance and influence, aligns nicely with one of our reasons for teaching this class. One of the points of distinction for Sloan is that he does an excellent job of comparing the presidents side-by-side. Both share a biographical chapter, and then, for example, presidential advisors and "core policies" are compared in back-to-back chapters.

In the second iteration of the class, we added Richard Neustadt's *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*.<sup>16</sup> This book was more appropriate for the upper-level course rather than the introductory one because it is quite nuanced, and students at the upper-level are expected to handle a higher reading load. We quickly discovered two advantages of including this textbook. First, it offered a competitor to Skowronek (via Sloan), which allowed the students to debate the merits of the concepts of political time and transformative presidents. Furthermore, Neustadt's timeframe bookends FDR and Reagan; but unlike Sloan, it also discusses the evolution of the modern presidency. This provided necessary historical context to students wondering about development of the executive branch, for example, between 1946 and 1981.

Having established a base knowledge of liberalism and conservatism and of both presidents, in addition

---

<sup>12</sup> "Conservatism," *Encyclopedia Britannica* online, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/conservatism>; "Liberalism," *Encyclopedia Britannica* online, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/liberalism>

<sup>13</sup> Roy Jenkins, *Franklin Delano Roosevelt: The American Presidents Series: The 32nd President, 1933-1945* (New York: Times Books, 2003); Jacob Weisberg, *Ronald Reagan: The American Presidents Series: The 40th President, 1981-1989* (New York: Times Books, 2016).

<sup>14</sup> Richard Polenberg, *The Era of Franklin Delano Roosevelt* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000); Meg Jacobs and Julian Zelizer, *Conservatives in Power: The Reagan Years, 1981-1989* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> John Sloan, *FDR and Reagan: Transformative Presidents with Clashing Visions* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*, Revised edition (New York: Free Press, 1991).



to the nature of presidential power, we engaged students in the process of understanding presidential debates. We read several chapters from Alan Schroeder's *Presidential Debates: Risky Business on the Campaign Trail* to understand the nature, scope, and format of past debates.<sup>17</sup> We then broke students up into groups and assigned them a specific presidential debate to watch and analyze. The debates were available on YouTube, and so students analyzed JFK/Nixon, Carter/Reagan, George H.W. Bush/Clinton/Perot, Obama/Romney, and Trump/Clinton. We required each group report back to the class (for about ten minutes) on what they learned about the style and content of their assigned debate. In addition, based on the debate they watched, each group was required to submit five to seven questions the group would have asked had they been moderator.

By watching presidential debates, our students came to appreciate and understand the different styles (single moderator, panel, town hall) and to note how some candidates' performances differed depending on the style of debate. For example, George H.W. Bush famously appeared distant and uninterested in a town hall style debate, while "everyman" Bill Clinton was much more at ease with the public. In addition, by studying different questions asked by different types of questioners—professional journalists versus the famous "undecided voters" of the town hall—the students were also able to model questions for their different styles of debates. Thus, the students were thinking about how to frame a debate and how to make it substantive as part of their building toward performing their own debates.

We assessed the students' knowledge in several ways up to this point in the course. We employed the flipped classroom model of discussion based on readings they had done in advance. We asked students to keep weekly journals in which they took notes on all the assigned materials before class and then took notes of the main points raised by our class discussions. They also had to write two discussion questions for every class in their journals. This held them accountable for doing the reading and gave us license to call on them during class to offer either their thoughts or to prompt them to ask their discussion question. We collected and graded these on a regular basis. Exams could have worked for assessing content knowledge, but we preferred a more Socratic model in order to draw students out of their shells.

The most important components of our class were the presidential debates which allowed our students to inhabit the personalities of FDR and Reagan. Following Fliter and others' leads, we required iterative assignments designed to offer the students several opportunities to inhabit the personas of each president. At the end of the semester, each debate was performed in the largest classroom on campus, and both campus and local media were invited to view and report on the debates. Knowing early in the semester the format and context for the debates indicated to the students, in both classes, that we took the final product very seriously.

Planning for the debate took up the final third of the course. In keeping with historical presidential debates, we chose three topics: Economic Policy, Social Policy, and Foreign Policy. We spent one class period generating debate questions based upon a combination of questions from past presidential debates and questions that we thought would get the best answers out of each candidate. We then had to appoint students to play our FDRs and Reagans. Because our first class contained ten students and our second twenty-two, we approached these debates differently.

There were a lot of commonalities between the two courses, but we had to alter the format and assignments depending on class size. In the ten-student class we prepared three debates of thirty-minutes on each subject. This format provided only six opportunities for students to perform as a presidential candidate. This was not a problem because several students were very enthusiastic about the role-playing, while others were mortified at the thought. Therefore, there was some good-natured negotiation as to who would perform as the presidents. Some students needed to be encouraged, but eventually, we got our six. Three of the remaining students acted as debate moderators. The fourth was responsible for liaising with the campus press and getting word out to the campus community through social media.

---

<sup>17</sup> Alan Schroeder, *Presidential Debates: Risky Business on the Campaign Trail*, Third edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

With each student assigned a role, we then broke students down into groups of three, three, and four. Each group acted as a research and prep team responsible for going out and finding speeches and primary source documents for their assigned president and on their assigned topic. We decided collectively that students would know the questions in advance and would have a pre-prepared script to read off in answering the question. This alleviated students' fears of freezing on stage. We agreed that they could go off script in response to their opponent's answer in the rebuttal section, but there was no expectation that they would have to engage in rigorous debate beyond what was written for them.

We gave students two weeks to find sources and come up with their scripted answers. They knew the debate questions, now they had to find the words from each president on how they would have answered. It was essential that primary sources from each the president's speeches and writings formed the basis of the debate content: That way we were getting an unfiltered view of both their ideas and of their rhetorical prowess. The Bedford series of books, which we had already read earlier in the class, contained excellent primary source examples, but the superb online *American Presidency Project* out of UC-Santa Barbara contained a wealth of searchable documents for students to explore.<sup>18</sup> Most of this work was done outside of class, but we met regularly to guide and advise students, keep them on track, and get updates. We gave them a dry-run in class for each debate so we could edit their content and so they could gain experience presenting.

For the class with twenty-two students, we employed similar assignments and set-up. We accommodated the larger number of students by having two debates on Economic Policy, two debates on Social Policy, and one debate on Foreign Policy. This allowed us to have five FDRs, five Reagans, and five moderators. The remaining students worked on media outreach and/or were expected to contribute extra time finding sources and preparing their presidents. Ultimately, we found no perfect way of assigning equal work, but we found that the more advanced students in the class had no concerns about fairness as they relished the opportunity to be center stage.

If this class were taught with either fewer or more students, we believe this model could be applied successfully by manipulating the number of debates and/or the expectations of the supporting students. While Westminster's small liberal arts environment proved conducive to this project, with some modifications it could easily be applied at a larger campus. Although larger universities are known for their 500 student lecture classes, most of these classes are also broken up into smaller discussion sections. The combination of a large lecture coupled with the small sections allows for both information foundations—about the foreign policy preferences of presidents, for example—to be laid out to all of the students in the class. The smaller sections allow for more specific instructions about debate formats, historical examples, and presidential speech patterns to be introduced. To be sure, such a setting would likely not allow for a debate series to occur over three distinct policy spaces, but having the debates take place in the discussion sections would allow all of the students in the class to play a role in a deeper dive into liberal and conservative thought in one policy space. This would also have the added benefit to graduate teaching assistants of offering them a place to practice their nontraditional pedagogy, which in turn could increase their job prospects.

While we were able to successfully inhabit Roosevelt and Reagan, it should be noted that similar structure with more concise policy spaces would also work, and may be more appropriate to some classes. Post-WWII or Vietnam War history classes, for example, could fashion a debate between Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, or even Hubert Humphrey and George McGovern to highlight the political difficulties of both defending and ending a U.S. war in Vietnam. Additionally, state universities do have smaller seminar type classes for their upper-level majors. Our project can serve as a model for professors in this setting. Upper-level classes on the history of the U.S. political parties, U.S. diplomatic history, and other similar topics could provide spaces suitable for this topic.

In our classes, the debates went off without a hitch. We occupied the largest lecture hall on campus and attracted a small audience of mostly the students' friends. Moving to a more prominent environment also

---

<sup>18</sup>“The American Presidency Project,” <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>

created a space something more akin to an actual debate stage. According to the Harvard School of Education's advice on role-playing in the classroom, creating a "real world" environment is an essential component to maximizing the effect of such an exercise.<sup>19</sup> We projected images of the American flag on a large screen behind the students during the debate. Similarly, we requested that students dress professionally in their debates, although we appreciate that the socio-economic status of each student might not always facilitate this. One of the student's parents showed up in the second class. The local newspaper, the *Fulton Sun*, ran a front-page article on the event.<sup>20</sup> Having prepared scripts clearly helped with the students' nervousness, but—having spent so long understanding the issues and absorbing past presidential debates—all seemed comfortable with responding to questions in the rebuttal section.

We equivocated as to whether we wanted to declare a winner of the debates. After all, the point of the class is to listen to the other side and empathize with their point of view. However, the students overwhelmingly wanted a vote at the end of the debates. Perhaps this gave them the necessary incentive to put in extra effort. We asked the students and audience members in attendance to vote via anonymous paper ballot on who they thought won the debates. This created some fascinating moments of high tension as the results were read. In the first class, Reagan won 2-1. In the second class, FDR won 3-2. We were curious to know why each president won.

We spent some time following the debates debriefing how and why each president was the most persuasive. We observed that presentation and rhetorical clarity plays an enormous role in influencing our students as to who won. We had observed this previously when students (of both classes) watched past presidential debates and tended to focus on who looked the most "presidential." Perhaps we are all guilty of this: When we think of the moments that we remember from past debates, it is Nixon sweating, Reagan's sunny quips, Bush looking at his watch, or Clinton's "feeling our pain," etc. One response to Al Gore's sighing in the first presidential debate of 2000 was, "He sounded like a dick." The messenger seemed as important as the message. As such, the calmer, more prepared, and more relaxed students tended to win the debates. This observation could lead to a wider discussion with students about the importance of "likeability" in presidential candidates. But it also gave them a clear example of Neustadt's main thesis that presidents cannot dominate politics without the ability to persuade and maintain their legitimacy or prestige. More importantly, we wanted to know what, if anything, each student had learned about liberalism, conservatism, and rational political dialogue.

### Examining Students' Experiences and Feedback

At the end of the first class, we erred by not collecting substantive feedback on how, or if, the students' perspectives on these issues had evolved. We did, at least, have meaningful discussions around these issues, and it was clear that the class had significantly increased their knowledge on both FDR and Reagan and on the nature of presidential power and persuasion. They all agreed that they had also broadened their understanding of, and empathy with, diverse political viewpoints. For the second iteration of the class, we wanted to be far more intentional in expanding on these points. For the students' final assignment, we required them to write substantive answers to the following questions:

- Would you consider yourself more conservative, liberal, or neutral/undecided before taking this class? (Optional if you do not want to answer)
- What were some of your conceptions about liberalism before taking the class?
- What were some of your conceptions about conservatism before taking the class?
- What did you know about FDR before taking this class? Any stereotypes? Myths?
- Did the class change your views on FDR in any way? If so, how?

<sup>19</sup>"Want to Facilitate Role Playing in Your Class?" Harvard University, ABLConnect, <https://ablconnect.harvard.edu/want-facilitate-role-playing-your-class>

<sup>20</sup>Helen Wilbers, "Students Channel Roosevelt, Reagan," *Fulton Sun*, May 2, 2019, <https://www.fultonsun.com/news/local/story/2019/may/02/students-channel-roosevelt-reagan/776873/>

- What did you know about Reagan before taking this class? Any stereotypes? Myths?
- Did the class change your views on Reagan in any way? If so, how?
- What books/assignments worked best for preparing you for expanding your knowledge on FDR/Reagan? What worked least?
- Did this class expand your knowledge of the American Presidency? Explain why or why not.
- What did you learn about presidential speech/rhetoric/communication during this course?
- Did the debate format allow you to get to know each president, their leadership styles, and their policies more fully than from just readings? Explain why or why not.
- Did the class content and format give you a better understanding about American politics today?
- What are the main lessons you took away from this class? List three or four and explain your answers.
- What would you like to see done differently in future iterations of this class? (i.e. assignments, readings, group work)
- Did you work more / less / same as your other upper-level major courses?
- Is there anything that you would like to add that we have not asked you about? Be as honest as you like.

Because we required students to turn in these responses to complete the course, they were not anonymous. Therefore, we accepted that there is an inherent risk that they would write what they thought we wanted to hear. But having worked closely with them in this and several other classes, we encouraged them to be as honest as possible, and we are confident that they were.

We were very encouraged with the responses. Universally, every student noted that they had increased their content knowledge of FDR, Reagan, liberalism, conservatism, and the presidency. One student who had little background in political history noted,

I've learned most about, firstly, the central ideas flowing underneath both dominant ideologies present in America today. Second, I've learned a lot about the figureheads of those two ideologies, both about who they were, and what their ideals are. Armed with these lessons, I can confidently say that I understand American politics far better than I used to.

Another, who self-identified as a small-government conservative added, "Though I'm still extremely skeptical of the Executive, I now better understand its role and respect its necessity within our system." Most encouraging were the ways in which the course seems to have opened students' minds to new ways of political thinking.

The role-playing debate seems to have amplified this intellectual growth. Every student noted that the debates allowed them a far deeper learning experience than just analysis of texts. One stated, "The debates were probably my favorite parts of the class, and in my opinion did teach me more about my own assigned president than the readings on the specific subject to which I was assigned." Another added,

The debate was the single most enlightening assignment in this class that allowed me to learn more about the two Presidents. In order to truly debate, both for and against the two men, I had to deep dive into their time as President, including the victories and the criticisms. I was able to more thoroughly examine the issues that were assigned to me, and through those few questions I was able to extrapolate ideology, policy, and personality in a more personal and real way than simply reading about them.

While there is scope for further data collection and analysis in future iterations of this class, the early signs are encouraging.

A key goal for the course was for students to empathize with and to understand the importance of bipartisanship and compromise. In our classroom discussions and assignment debriefs, this is an issue we stressed. We repeatedly asked students to analyze and reflect on why it is so important to achieve compromise and to acknowledge opposing viewpoints, otherwise we ran the risk of hardening the lines which divided the two sides. One of the questions we asked at the end of the course was whether students' opinions of either liberalism or conservatism had changed. One conservative student stated, "I believed that majority of liberals were just young people, who did not know what they were talking about, and followed this party because it was the cool thing to do. After this course I realized I was wrong, and I do have more respect for them." A student who identified as liberal claimed,

I learned to respect Reagan a lot more. For one, I learned why people respected him and hailed him as one of the greatest presidents. I also learned to respect conservatism a lot more. It is more than simply religion or racism and the true meaning of conservatism is overlooked due to radicals and/or my own not delving enough into the ideology of it.

Such acknowledgment of diverse viewpoints is a baseline for rational political dialogue and compromise. In future iterations of this course, however, we want to push students to express the need for bipartisan understanding further. We may make it a part of their final reflective essay to express fully how their acquired knowledge on FDR, Reagan, and the presidency can point to a more amicable future. We may also encourage students to present their ideas to the campus community or encourage them to write op-eds to school and local newspapers. Certainly, more data is needed, but we are encouraged by the initial signs.

## Conclusion

Based on the formal and informal student feedback, we believe that teaching this class has allowed our students to explore how it is both possible and necessary to have rational and respectful political discourse. Both FDR and Reagan were great communicators and were able to articulate their visions for the United States in ways that seem lost in the current political milieu. We believe that the course demonstrated that both of these icons of liberalism and conservatism cared deeply for this nation, and that neither of the philosophies they espoused pose the kind of existential threat to society that their naysayers often opine. Contemporary politicians and political pundits would do well to heed their example.

Not everyone agrees with the policies enacted by FDR or Reagan; far from it. They had their detractors at the time and ever since. But they were able to persuade the electorate that both liberalism and conservatism can both serve the common good if understood and presented rationally. One can only speculate as to how their message might have held up in the current environment of social media and cable news scrutiny. But they had a style of leadership that, we believe, allows our students to appreciate the value of both liberalism and conservatism. Studying both presidents, emulating them, and ultimately becoming them in the classroom provided an opportunity for students to move beyond the negative stereotypes and vitriol that is such an unwelcome part of their political lives.



# OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES IN HISTORY: A STATE-OF-THE-FIELD ESSAY

Katherine Foshko Tsan

Baruch College-CUNY

Center for Teaching and Learning

Teaching History 46(2)

DOI: 10.33043/TH.46.2.12-19

© 2021 Tsan.

Distributed with [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 License](#).

As I learn about OER, the moral clarity of using materials that are entirely free and clear for pedagogical distribution is obvious and appealing. The pandemic has heightened an already building urgency to keep the costs of course materials low. For my class this fall, I haven't required students to buy anything at all.

Caroline Sherman  
Catholic University of America  
History Department, 2020

In a 2018 essay in the Open Pedagogy Notebook entitled, “The Time Is Now: A Call to Open up History,” Thomas Peace, a Canadian historian, described the ethical and practical arguments that made him a “slow convert” to the movement to adapt, adopt, and author openly licensed materials, many of them online.<sup>1</sup> In the United States, no equivalent essays have so far been published in mainstream academia, and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* has afforded the twenty-year-old movement for openly licensed materials incomplete coverage at best. Yet, according to a 2019 *Inside Higher Ed* survey,<sup>2</sup> thirty-nine percent of all faculty polled fully supported the increased use of educational technologies. An August 2020 survey by Every Learner Everywhere and Tyton Partners saw the proportion of instructors who see online learning as effective increase to forty-nine percent from thirty-nine percent in May.<sup>3</sup> And, in 2020, the American Historical Association created a page of Remote Teaching Services, “professionally vetted by historians,” addressing a persistent worry from faculty about quality control in open resources. While the focus of the AHA's webpage is not specifically Open Educational Resources (OER), many open access databases, such as La Florida: Digital Archive of the Americas and textbooks like *Sage American History*, have gotten the emergency stamp of approval.<sup>4</sup>

Despite open resources' steadily growing presence in historical research and teaching, they still have a way to go before being accepted as a first-choice solution. This article aims to provide an overview of the unique opportunities for innovative pedagogy that have entered the history field with OER—textbooks, informational and experiential websites, and interactive digital tools for scholarly research—while reviewing current challenges to their uptake.

## Textbooks and Teaching Modules

The many definitions of open educational resources point to the diversity of the field; according to UNESCO, these are “teaching, learning, and research materials in any medium, digital or otherwise, that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open [e.g. Creative Commons or public-domain-equivalent] license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Peace, “The Time Is Now: Open up History,” The Open Pedagogy Notebook, 2019. Accessed at <http://openpedagogy.org/textbooks/the-time-is-now-a-call-to-open-history/>

<sup>2</sup> Doug Lederman, “Professors’ Slow, Steady Acceptance of Online Learning: A Survey,” October 30, 2019, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/survey/professors-slow-steady-acceptance-online-learning-survey>

<sup>3</sup> Kristen Fox, Nandini Srinivasan, Nicole Lin, Anh Nguyen and Gates Bryant, Every Learner Everywhere and Tyton Partners, *Time for Class COVID-19 Edition Part II*, October 5, 2020, <https://tytonpartners.com/library/time-for-class-covid-19-edition-part-2/> referenced in Doug Lederman, “Faculty Confidence in Online Learning Grows,” October 6, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/digital-history-resources>

<sup>5</sup> Open Educational Resources, UNESCO, <https://en.unesco.org/themes/ict-education/oeer#:~:text=%C2%A9%20UNESCO,adaptation%20and%20distribution%20of%20resources>



Given the origins of the movement in lowering the costs of education around the world, for the majority of scholars it has translated, first and foremost, to “open textbooks.” Therefore, the impetus to adopt OERs has often been exclusively tied to affordability—to the exclusion of their scholarly contribution or pedagogical qualities. A proper overview of the field is not typically provided as a comprehensive service of academic libraries or university centers that support teaching and learning, and such reviews are often only available upon request.

While a casual reader of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* would be aware of the existence of textual OERs, the first barrier to their actual adoption is that of discoverability. A comment from a professor of American history about the lack of an “OER clearinghouse or search engine, with several filters,” is typical. Two dedicated OneSearch-type engines, OASIS and the Mason OER Metafinder, are, in fact, currently live and undergoing constant improvement in their treatment of metadata. Most scholars without a title or author in mind, however, turn to time-tested national repositories that feature on most libguides: OER Commons (an online library founded in 2007 and organized by module and education level), OpenStax (an educational technology initiative started in 2012 and largely dedicated to beginner textbooks, with some additional materials), and the Open Textbook Library (a smaller, dedicated repository also launched in 2012). In a history textbook search, these repositories cite P. Scott Corbett’s *U.S. History, History in the Making: A History of the People of the United States of America to 1877*, *The American Yawp*, *World History: Cultures, States and Societies to 1500*, and *Western Civilizations: A Concise History, Volume 1*.<sup>6</sup> Because some textbooks exist on smaller, dedicated websites, this list is not exhaustive, although its general focus on either U.S. or global history is reflective of the field as a whole.

How do the above open textbooks fare along measurable metrics? The Open Textbook Library, the only fully peer-reviewed OER repository, rates most of these 4 out of 5, with *American Yawp* netting a superlative 4.5 stars; the number of reviews (by solicited faculty) ranges from the single digits to twenty or so. A quantitative study of the uptake of *American Yawp* has concluded that student learning outcomes actually improved when moving away from a traditional American history textbook.<sup>7</sup> These results correspond to other study findings comparing analog to open materials in the same subject, in which both students and teachers perceived the OERs to be of “at least equal quality.”<sup>8</sup>

Other metrics, such as numbers of downloads where available, may matter just as much for the assessment of an open digital resource. For example, Helmut Loeffler wrote his *Introductory Guide to Ancient Civilizations* after he perceived whole populations being excised from the classic narrative. Loeffler, a history professor at Queensborough Community College, City University of New York (CUNY), wrote the book in the spirit of social justice aimed to include more groups in a new text. The resultant work does not have an affiliation with a major university publisher and does not come up in a repository search. It is housed in the OER section of CUNY Academic Works, an institutional repository that provides access to faculty research and scholarship.<sup>9</sup> The publication, which also has a 4.5 rating on Amazon (where it is published at cost), recorded 3,500 downloads on the CUNY Academic Works website in 2019, with the numbers going up during the Covid-19 pandemic to 12,353 across 147 countries as of November 2021. This result, as Loeffler has pointed out, eclipses the typical run of any history hardcover, while the geography of the downloads—mostly from Eastern Africa and India—point

<sup>6</sup> P. Scott Corbett, Volker Janssen, and John M. Lund, *U.S. History* (OpenStax, 2015); Catherine Locks, Sarah Mergel, Pamela Thomas Roseman, and Tamara Spike, *History in the Making: A History of the People of the United States of America to 1877* (University System of Georgia: The University Press of North Georgia, 2013); Joseph Locke, Ben Wright, et al., *The American Yawp* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019); Eugene Berger, *World History: Cultures, States and Societies to 1500* (History Open Textbooks, 2016); Christopher Brooks, *Western Civilizations: A Concise History, Volume 1* (Portland: Portland Community College, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> See Kim Grewe and William Preston Davis, “The Impact of Enrollment in an OER Course on Student Learning Outcomes,” *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning* 18, no. 4 (2017).

<sup>8</sup> See T. J. Bliss, T. Jared Robinson, John Hilton, and David Wiley, “An OER COUP: College Teacher and Student Perceptions of Open Educational Resources,” *Journal of Interactive Media in Education* (Spring 2013), 16.

<sup>9</sup> Helmut Loeffler and Arturo Enamorado III, *Introductory Guide to Ancient Civilizations* (CUNY Academic Works, 2015; CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016).

to the importance of free and open texts for English-speaking institutions around the world.<sup>10</sup>

Yet, reservations about open textbooks persist among many instructors. Explanations that free textbooks “do not have the content, writing, or editing quality I seek” are typical, and associating copyright with value often prevails. The low level of awareness of the Creative Commons, an organization that grants a variety of legal public licenses enabling sharing and revising and which has gone hand in hand with the development of open educational resources, might be to blame. Perhaps more pertinently, the peer review culture that open textbooks tend to bypass may also be responsible for some of this apprehension: The imprimatur granted by colleagues’ positive assessment is hard for many to turn down.<sup>11</sup> The reliance of the open field on uncertain institutional and grant funding in the absence of credits for tenure and promotion also leads to resources often having less polish than their counterparts that go the route of commercial publishing.

Issues of quality—real and perceived—aside, the pared-down narrative and insufficiency of enhanced features characteristic of some (though not all) open-source textbooks may automatically sway readers against them.<sup>12</sup> The extra perks of many images, live links, timelines, and videos often constitute an unaffordable luxury. Loeffler has described how the time and resources at his disposal had made anything beyond the authoring of a basic text impossible.<sup>13</sup> While the affordances of the open license make it easy to build on additions to the existing textbooks (or swap out undesired chapters), faculty just learning about their options rarely hear about this as a possibility. For instance, Caroline Sherman, who teaches the history survey course at the Catholic University of America, offers the following assessment about the open option in comparison to the texts she typically assigns (Grafton and Bell, *The West: A New History* and Adelman et al., *Worlds Together, Worlds Apart*): “The material is clear, and the stripped-down narrative might be easier for students to follow. It doesn’t seem like quite the same invitation to opulence as my preferred textbooks, but if half of the class is struggling to buy a textbook, then the textbook isn’t going to read to them as an invitation at all.”<sup>14</sup> Sherman’s decision was ultimately not to assign a commercial text during the pandemic, but other instructors—for instance, those who teach as adjuncts—often do not have this choice. Others may hesitate to make changes to their pedagogy given a dearth of positive messaging and competing rationales and incentives.

Yet what of those textual resources that do not lay a claim to competing with traditional ones, but actually complement them? The OER Commons aggregate website lists over two hundred items under the history rubric, most of them not textbooks but varied teaching modules. Such a search might reveal, for instance, an inquiry-based learning unit from the Rockefeller Archive Center based on document analysis of primary sources from the RAC’s 1933-45 Refugee Scholar Program. The unit contains an exercise that “ask[s] students to consider what foundations can do in times of global crisis by placing them in the role of Rockefeller Foundation (RF) program officers during World War II.”<sup>15</sup> Other open teaching materials include syllabi, homework assignments, slide presentations, diagrams/illustrations, classroom activities, and much more. All these objects are designed to exist alongside (or, potentially, replace) the textbook and enrich the classroom experience, and their license allows the instructors to modify, reorganize, and distribute the information within as they see fit, with attribution. Communicating the variability and built-in flexibility of OER—and carefully curating resources that might be of interest to the specific history department—is a task for colleges’ auxiliary services, with support from the administration a necessary condition for this message to be heard.

---

<sup>10</sup> See Helmut Loeffler, “Experiencing with Authoring and Using an OER Textbook,” paper presented at the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Open Education Conference, 30 October 2019. The author thanks Dr. Loeffler for the conversation clarifying some of the points made in his presentation.

<sup>11</sup> See Melinda Baldwin, “Credibility, Peer Review, and *Nature*, 1939-1990,” *Notes and Records: The Royal Society Journal of the History of Science* 69, no. 3 (2015), 337–352.

<sup>12</sup> Jordan Reed, “The Textbook as Technology in the Age of Open Education Resources,” *The History Teacher* 54 no. 4 (August 2019), 637-651.

<sup>13</sup> Helmut Loeffler, “Experiencing with Authoring and Using an OER Textbook.”

<sup>14</sup> Caroline Sherman, interview/communication, November 16, 2020.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.oercommons.org/authoring/58232-refugee-scholar-primary-source-workshop/view>

## Informational Websites and Interactive Experiences

When Michael Hart created the first-ever e-book in 1971 by making the U.S. Declaration of Independence available to other computer users at the University of Illinois, the idea of digitizing texts for open consumption was as novel and unfamiliar as computers themselves. The eventual product of his efforts, Project Gutenberg, became the first digital library. Hart originally typed in 313 texts himself, and Project Gutenberg now contains over 60,000 items in the public domain. Meanwhile, Hart's pioneering thoughts about how technology can serve to increase access to knowledge, expressed in his 1995 book, *A Brief History of the Internet*, have laid the ground for the open culture movement. His torch was later taken up by the literacy advocate Eric Eldred and the legal academic Lawrence Lessig, who with Hal Abelson founded the Creative Commons in 2001. Those activists pushed back against the Sonny Bono Copyright Term Expansion Act (1998) to advocate for a cooperative internet true to its original premise.

In 2006, Roy Rosenzweig, who had founded one of the world's first digital history hubs (the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University, now the Roy Rosenzweig Center), reviewed the five-year-old open educational resource *par excellence*, Wikipedia (Hart had actually thought of an "Internetpedia" in 1993, but left it at the planning stage). Rosenzweig's article "Can History Be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past?" compared the website favorably to analog encyclopedias, judged it to be a fine example of collective history, and bemoaned the tradition-bound individualism at the heart of much historical scholarship.<sup>16</sup> This endorsement paved the way to academe's acceptance of Wikipedia as a conduit of information and a source to grapple with, if not quite an authoritative fount of wisdom. It was also a vote of confidence for the collaborative and iterative work of sharing materials, which lies at the heart of open educational resources.

Since its founding, the influential Roy Rosenzweig Center has produced over a hundred projects in historical research and education using digital media and technology.<sup>17</sup> A number of these initiatives have been released under a Creative Commons license, enabling their data to be downloaded and reused in a scholarly context. They include: *The Lost Museum* (a recreation and study of P.T. Barnum's American Museum using 3D technologies); *Mapping Early American Elections* (centered on interactive maps and visualizations); and *World History Sources* (conceived as a course website with extra resources). In 2019, the Center and the American Social History Project at the City University of New York announced that a textbook of record that Rosenzweig had co-authored, *Who Built America: Working People and the Nation's History*, was to be made into an OER with updated content and multimedia teaching resources.<sup>18</sup> The public statements also alluded to the initiative's objective to create a sustainable environment for another open resource, the U.S.-focused George Mason University website, *History Matters*.

While the majority of digital history sites remain under copyright—including most at the Rosenzweig Center—several university projects have followed the lead of pioneering initiatives to open up their databases for downloading, sharing and (re-)use.<sup>19</sup> Others, trying to make their collections not just open but user-friendly, have started far-reaching projects but at times encountered challenges that have prevented them from completing their work. A case in point is CUNY's Philip C. Van Buskirk Archive, which has digitized the first seven years of a nineteenth-century sailor's unpublished and hand-illustrated personal journals. A 2017 notice on the site proclaims the archive "free and publicly available for reading and searching and... eventually also... available to interested scholars to annotate, index, and tag in XML." While the long-term hope is "for a multimedia site, hosting also color illustrations that are part of the original journals, images of Van Buskirk, anything pertinent

---

<sup>16</sup> Roy Rosenzweig, "Can History Be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 93, no. 1 (June 2006), 117-146.

<sup>17</sup> See the Rosenzweig Center website: <https://rchnm.org/>

<sup>18</sup> See the dual announcements at <https://ashp.cuny.edu/news/neh-digital-humanities-grant-who-built-america> and <https://rchnm.org/news/who-built-america-to-become-oer-with-revamped-history-matters-content/>

<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, the Behind the Veil project at Duke University: <https://repository.duke.edu/dc/behindtheveil>

to Van Buskirk’s life, and links to other relevant projects,” the reality of locating the time and resources to maintain digital collections may be holding those ambitions in check.<sup>20</sup>

While some initiatives might be kept back by the realities of hiring content managers and website developers, the initial barrier for projects that make history available to anyone has to be the hosting library or archive’s readiness to open up their resources. The original Van Buskirk diaries are housed in the Special Collections of the University of Washington Libraries (and “available only on site or on microfilm via interlibrary loan,” as CUNY points out). Institutional goodwill and organization are needed to digitize more collections such as this one and set them up for online scholarship. Select libraries have actually made the gesture to render their holdings open under a Creative Commons license. A case in point is the Folger Shakespeare Library, whose collections have been a source of many a digital humanities project; CUNY Digital History, an open institutional archive now being used for the creation of an asynchronous historical game about the struggle for open admissions;<sup>21</sup> and the John Carter Brown (JCB) Library, which has made its digital collection of pre-1825 Americas open access.

Elizabeth Heath and Julia Landweber, both historians of colonial France (Baruch College, CUNY and Montclair State University respectively) are two scholars who have relied on the JCB Library’s collection to plan their digital undertaking, *Visualizing the Data of the Eighteenth-Century French Caribbean*. The project, about the economic and political uses of France’s colonies in the Caribbean, relies on eighteenth-century French census records (released with permission) and digitized historical maps, openly provided by the library, which will be transformed into geo-referenced files. The library’s permissions will make it possible for the online resource to remain a renewable one in the future—for scholars to download the maps and instructors to use them in teaching, perhaps with the help of other open-source mapping tools.<sup>22</sup> Heath and Landweber state on their website that they hope to build out the project with an “analytical armory,” adding critical essays, timelines, and suggestions for further research. The end result therefore seeks to be not a stable, archived reenactment of history, such as Edward Ayers’ *The Valley of the Shadow*<sup>23</sup> or Janine Barchas’ *What Jane Saw*<sup>24</sup>—two classics of the digital history genre—but a dynamic work primed for iterations and collaborations.

## Digital Tools for Research and Scholarship

Some of the greatest changes the open-source revolution has wrought in the way history is practiced on a day-to-day basis have taken place in the sphere of research and scholarship. In 2006, the Rosenzweig Center introduced Zotero, which helps collect, organize, and analyze gathered data. At its base, the tool is about capturing, managing, and citing sources—services that are becoming increasingly useful as more and more archives get digitized and available. The next year, the same team created Omeka, an open-source platform for the display of archival, museum, or research collections. And, in 2018, the Center responded to the decade-long practice of allowing photography in the archives by creating the open-source tool Tropy, which allows scholars to organize their digital photos, tag them individually or in bulk, search across the metadata, and export to other platforms. Tools created elsewhere to help historians analyze the data they collect include the open-source Tesseract, used for optical character recognition, and Recogito, an open geo-tagging and geo-referencing technology specifically designed to work with maps.<sup>25</sup> With this assortment of new digital solutions, historical research can be greatly eased and streamlined, and the ever-present problem of PC data storage and retrieval—and potential data loss—kept at bay. A struggle that remains, however, is coming up with enough funding and institutional will to educate scholars in the use of these novel resources. The challenges of integrating technical training into graduate academic programs—as well as in faculty professional development—is one that has been

---

<sup>20</sup> <https://vanbuskirk.commons.gc.cuny.edu/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://blogs.baruch.cuny.edu/cunygame/>

<sup>22</sup> [https://blogs.baruch.cuny.edu/mappingthefrenchcaribbean/?page\\_id=31](https://blogs.baruch.cuny.edu/mappingthefrenchcaribbean/?page_id=31)

<sup>23</sup> <https://valley.lib.virginia.edu/>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.whatjanesaw.org/>

<sup>25</sup> The author wishes to thank Dr. Dimitris Papadopoulos for providing helpful information about Tesseract and Recogito.



raised in the context of introducing new tools and technologies.<sup>26</sup> Wider publicity for their advantages, on a departmental as well as an institutional level, would help instill new habits in the rising generation of scholars.

The appearance of digital tools that ease the historian's work of management and organization can already be seen as a watershed moment in the profession. In this vein, John Mack Faragher's decision to publish his 5,000 meticulously labeled research notes in a project entitled *Digitizing Daniel Boone* appears as an important gesture encouraging transparency about the way scholars conduct their work. The end result is a resource to be emulated and a practicum for any student entering the profession.<sup>27</sup> Yet, a more important affordance than citation management of open-source technologies like Zotero, Recogito, and Tropy is their built-in ability to share information. Anything made with these tools can be emailed or transferred, via attachment, to a group library or a research team—as well as made completely public. In 2007, the digital “personal assistant” Zotero joined forces with the Internet Archive, the world's greatest multimedia online library, to create a commons via which a scholar's gathered materials could be stored permanently on the Archive.

These latest open-source creations challenge Rosenzweig's own statement that “historical scholarship is characterized by *possessive* individualism,” followed by his estimate that only six percent of all recent articles have more than one author.<sup>28</sup> Yet, when analyzing three recent introductory texts for the profession, James Herbert found that two of them still described the historian's endeavor as basically solitary. One, James Cortada's 2015 *History Hunting: A Guide for Fellow Adventurers*, pointed to how the digital revolution is transforming research technique and encouraged greater collaboration among scholars.<sup>29</sup>

If Wikipedia, pointedly described by Rosenzweig as “a historical work without owners and with multiple, anonymous authors”<sup>30</sup> has gained widespread acceptance, so could the collaborative practices of open-source tools for historical scholarship—as well as the usage of data in open repositories and the adaptation of open texts, where straightforward adoption might not satisfy the exigencies of the instructor. While these are lofty goals, the *Time for Class COVID-19* survey states that 60 percent of instructors nationwide have reported integrating new digital tools in the classroom. While perhaps driven by necessity, this finding points to an unprecedented comfort with technology (if not specifically open-source matter).<sup>31</sup>

The uptake of resources is, first and foremost, a matter of discovery, and concerted efforts by history departments working alongside college administrations, libraries, and teaching centers are necessary in this regard. While the existing libguides and research guides on history OERs are a step in the right direction, a more centralized effort by norm-setting organizations in the profession remains essential. The webpage recently published on the website of the American Historical Association, which lists digital (again, not specifically open) projects launched from 2015 to 2018, “Guidelines for the Professional Evaluation of Digital Scholarship” as well as “Resources for Getting Started in Digital History” should act as a stimulus for the field.<sup>32</sup> Another initiative from the AHA is a still-to-come listing of digital archives. The website currently has an option for contributors to submit “their favorite primary-source archival collection,” with a listing of the geographical area.<sup>33</sup> This crowdsourcing effort should reveal significant gaps in the field (digital history resources pertaining to the United States prevail) and, hopefully, a robust effort to rectify those gaps by the launching of new initiatives.

The current attention to undergraduates' fiscal needs, combined with the need to diversify teaching material

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Allison Marsh, *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 28, no. 2 (June 2013), 279–282.

<sup>27</sup> <https://sourcnotes.miamioh.edu/daniel-boone/> This resource is powered by SourceNotes, an online platform which helps researchers organize their notes from primary and secondary sources, developed by Andrew Offenberger at Miami University and Raphael Folsom at the University of Oklahoma.

<sup>28</sup> Roy Rosenzweig, “Can History Be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past,” 117.

<sup>29</sup> James Herbert, “Professions and Publics: Three Views of Doing History,” *Perspectives on History* (May 2013).

<sup>30</sup> Roy Rosenzweig, “Can History Be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past,” 117.

<sup>31</sup> Kristin Fox, et al., *Time for Class COVID-19 Edition Part II*, October 5, 2020, <https://tytonpartners.com/library/time-for-class-covid-19-edition-part-2/> referenced in Doug Lederman, “Faculty Confidence in Online Learning Grows,” October 6, 2020.

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/digital-history-resources>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/digital-history-resources/digital-primary-sources>

during the Covid-19 pandemic may provide the greatest impulse to both the discovery and creation of accessible resources in history. A case in point is the Covid-19 Archive, *Journal of the Plague Year* (JOTPY), which has grown to include thousands of multimedia items and partnered with Brooklyn College and Bronx Community College. Students are encouraged to contribute their personal accounts in a multitude of formats and reach out to others in the larger archive, both domestically and internationally. This instance of “rapid response archiving,” started at Arizona State University and hosted with Omeka-S software, has given many learners a much-needed outlet and a chance to memorialize their experience of the pandemic.<sup>34</sup>

Historian Mark Tebeau describes JOTPY as an exercise in collective digital archiving, following in the footsteps of the September 11 Digital Archive and the Hurricane Digital Memory Bank, that rectifies lacunae in traditional collections, such as the experiences of the young and the very old.<sup>35</sup> Such an act of community-gathering goes to the heart of what open historical resources can be. Another instance of digital history-making now hosted on the Internet Archive is a collaborative exchange by the students of Brooklyn College-CUNY and members of a radio station in Sinazongwe, Zambia entitled *Building Radio Bridges-Audio Letters between Lockdown New York and the Zambezi Valley*. This mixed-content podcast commemorated the experiences of Spring 2020 and connected far-flung communities.<sup>36</sup> We may see more such projects that enable students to document their lived experience from wherever they are and serve as touchstones for sophisticated discussions in both traditional and virtual classrooms.

## Conclusion

As the acceptance of digital solutions becomes increasingly common, the flexibility, creativity, and community-building impetus of open-source materials and tools set them apart from traditional options. The vision behind the OER Commons, the Internet Archive, Wikipedia, and the Rosenzweig Center is gradually becoming a reality. At the same time, those who use and enjoy OERs need to keep in mind that while “information wants to be free,” as per Stewart Brand’s iconic phrase, the true meaning is “free of restrictions” rather than “free of cost.” Open educational resources are a public good—a status justified by their inclusion and equity aspects. They require public investment to pay the creators, keep the standards up to date, respond to the interests and needs of various communities, and ensure proper preservation. One workable model could be for creators to receive generous stipends for seed content. Institutions can then maintain, improve on, and iterate this content with the help of contributions that are crowdsourced or made part of instructional content by several departments.

Subject librarians may help introduce relevant collections to history classes by leading instructional sessions on what students can glean from a primary source such as the Philip Van Buskirk Archive or JOTPY. Some library and IT resources can also be diverted to partnering with instructors in creating relevant modules, from a short capsule session around a single item in the National Archives to a Pressbook devoted to an in-depth examination of a historical work.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, teaching centers can work with history departments on ways to assess student engagement with online resources, developing some guidelines around low- and high-stakes assignments aligned with classroom learning goals.

---

<sup>34</sup> See <https://covid-19archive.org/s/archive/page/Share>. Mark Tebeau discusses the archive in “A Journal of a Plague Year: Rapid-Response Archiving Meets the Pandemic,” *Collections: A Journal for Museum and Archives Professionals*, January 27, 2021. See, for example, the Brooklyn College-CUNY instance of the archive: <https://covid-19archive.org/s/brooklyncollege/page/welcome>

<sup>35</sup> Mark Tebeau, “A Journal of a Plague Year: Rapid-Response Archiving Meets the Pandemic.”

<sup>36</sup> [https://archive.org/details/BuildingRadioBridges\\_2020](https://archive.org/details/BuildingRadioBridges_2020). Another example of history-in-the-making as crowdsourced pedagogy is The Sociology of Hip Hop class at Brooklyn College <https://sochiphop.commons.gc.cuny.edu/>, which expects its students to “demonstrate knowledge of hip-hop history and its evolution” and “discuss the relationship between the social, economic, and political as they exist in hip hop and our society at large.”

<sup>37</sup> One example is a Pressbook created by Librarian Angela Weaver in partnership with her colleagues, an IT student and a subject scholar, Olympe de Gouges, *La France sauvée, ou le tyran détrôné: A Dramaturgical Casebook* <https://uw.pressbooks.pub/lafrancesauvee/>



SPARC's Open Pilot Textbook Program, currently up for renewal in Congress, constitutes the most promising federal grant initiative to date; on the state level, funding for the City University of New York and the State University of New York, now in its fifth year, has provided a powerful impetus for resource development and innovation.<sup>38</sup> Getting educators and students to use and create OER could be the key to further growth and innovation. Involving more organizations nationwide, such as public broadcast services, K-12 educational programs, and national museums, would be beneficial. For instance, themed exhibits could feature relevant digital history projects while soliciting derivative works based on public-domain sources or links to related content. Instructors might assign a presentation or analysis based on an online resource, then engage the creators of websites to link out to student work that illuminates or builds on their content. WordPress-based open publishing platforms, as well as open presentation-making tools such as Timeline JS and StoryMap JS from Northwestern University's Knight Lab, make individual engagement with knowledge easy to package and publish.<sup>39</sup>

Having students themselves participate in and author content that speaks to their own experience of historical events could also add to a growing field that seeks to legitimize individual voices and diversify class content—a potentially small-scale first encounter with OER.<sup>40</sup> Some history instructors have already begun to experiment with such open pedagogical formats. Examples at the author's own institution range from a StoryMap of a composer's hometown to a crowdsourced vision of contemporary political engagement. While such exercises may not fit with all teaching approaches, other options for expanding one's pedagogy to include a greater assortment of voices abound. A journey through open resources in history may start with a class session annotating a letter from a bygone era and comparing its message to a blog post from a "rapid archive"—or authoring such a post. Other instructors may begin elsewhere by assigning an open text that seeks to expand the geographic and historiographic scope of their field and accompany it with an interactive resource.

At the time of writing, the AHA has expanded its engagement with online learning with its inaugural, well-attended digital history workshop (Spring 2021), new free-to-access textbooks are being authored, and teaching and research tools tried out in specialized webinars. The profession's engagement with open resources, which dates back to Michael Hart's efforts half a century ago, is only beginning.

---

<sup>38</sup> "Governor Cuomo Announces First-in-the-Nation Excelsior Scholarship Program Will Provide Tuition-Free College to Middle-Class Families," April 8, 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-announces-first-nation-excelsior-scholarship-program-will-provide-tuition-free>

<sup>39</sup> For a description of Knight Lab's storytelling projects, see <https://knightlab.northwestern.edu/>

<sup>40</sup> See Rajiv Jhangiani and Arthur Green, "An Open Athenaeum: Creating an Institutional Home for Open Pedagogy" in *OER: A Field Guide for Academic Librarians*, <https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/oer-field-guide/chapter/an-open-athenaeum-creating-an-institutional-home-for-open-pedagogy/> and Catherine Cronin, "Opening up Open Pedagogy," April 24, 2017, <http://catherinecronin.net/research/opening-up-open-pedagogy/>

# TEACHING JACOBITISM FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Kirsteen M. MacKenzie  
Professional Historian

Teaching History 46(2)  
DOI: 10.33043/TH.46.2.20-27  
© 2021 MacKenzie.  
Distributed with [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

---

For many students in my Jacobite course, the attraction of the recent television series, *Outlander*, lay in the central love story between Claire Randall, a nurse from the Second World War and her Jacobite love interest Jamie Fraser.<sup>1</sup> I, however, was more drawn to the story of Claire Randall's husband Frank Randall, an Oxford professor of history who later accepts a post in the United States. This part of the story is set in the 1940s. The history profession Frank inhabits is elite, with a closed structure consisting of age-old rituals and rooms filled with old, white men. Frank, like many of his contemporaries at that time, conducted lectures, held seminars, and gave conference papers to students from privileged backgrounds in a face-to-face environment. In one particular and poignant scene, Claire, a highly intelligent woman in her own right, feels ostracised and alienated from Frank Randall's colleagues who see her simply as the "wife" whose role is to stay in the background and stay at home.<sup>2</sup> Watching this scene brought into sharp focus what historians used to be, and it made me reflect upon what historians are now and the potential for our role in the future. The emergence of public history, digital humanities, and online teaching have undoubtedly had an impact on how we teach eighteenth century studies, and these developments would have seemed alien to historians in the 1940s. My own journey in teaching and developing a Jacobite course from 2015 to 2021 is a microcosm of these evolutionary changes in practice.

Designed in 2015 as a face-to-face seminar, the purpose of my course, "Jacobites: War, Exile, and the Politics of Succession in Britain and Ireland 1688-1788," was to introduce undergraduate students to the various Jacobite risings which had taken place in Britain and Ireland between 1689 and 1746. I had envisioned that I would be teaching a mainly knowledge-based course for students in the final years of their undergraduate degree. The first series of *Outlander* had already aired in the United Kingdom, and the *Outlander* phenomenon was fast becoming a reality as tourists flocked to Scotland.<sup>3</sup> This influx of interest in Jacobite history spilled over into my Jacobite course as it became oversubscribed. Classes consisted of a wide range of nationalities and skills; a number of students who were fans of the show enrolled in the course purely out of interest. These students were studying for degrees outside the arts and humanities and never intended to embark on any kind of historical studies in the long term. I was very happy to accept these students in my course, but, as an instructor, I had the growing realization that I would have to outline the skills of the historians' craft to a much wider audience than I had initially anticipated.

Since 2015 there has been a significant shift in what I teach, how I teach, and how I see my future as a teacher of history in higher education. The purpose of this paper is to show this evolutionary process in practice and to demonstrate how a skills-based approach to historical thinking and the use of new technologies in the classroom can transform history courses, making them more attractive and beneficial for students. First, I outline key moments in this evolutionary process and emphasize how I incorporated skill-based tasks within the traditional classroom to challenge knowledge-based teaching. I then discuss how I used Twitter in my class, enabling students to interact in real time with leading experts in the field of Jacobite studies. Moving on to

---

<sup>1</sup> *Outlander* is a historical drama based on a novel series. It follows the experiences of a military nurse in Scotland who, in 1945, finds herself transported to 1743.

<sup>2</sup> Sony Pictures Television, *Outlander*, "The Battle Joined," Season 3 Episode 1 (2017), IMDB entry [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5791266/?ref\\_=ttep\\_ep1](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5791266/?ref_=ttep_ep1)

<sup>3</sup> Sony Pictures Television, *Outlander*, Season 1 (2014), IMDB entry <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3006802/episodes?season=1>; Erika Mailman, "The Outlander Effect: The Popular Book and TV Series is Increasing Travel to These Scottish Sites," *The Washington Post* 14 February 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/travel/the-outlander-effect-the-popular-book-and-tv-series-is-increasing-travel-to-these-scottish-sites/2020/02/13/900a2dfc-4c26-11ea-b721-9f4cdc90bc1c\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/travel/the-outlander-effect-the-popular-book-and-tv-series-is-increasing-travel-to-these-scottish-sites/2020/02/13/900a2dfc-4c26-11ea-b721-9f4cdc90bc1c_story.html); BBC News, "Outlander Tourism Effect a Double-Edged Sword," 15 February 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-51488784>

recent developments, I examine the challenges and opportunities in moving from a face-to-face module to a digital module. I conclude by reflecting on how these developments are changing the teaching of eighteenth-century history today.

### A Skills Based Approach to History Teaching

Sam Wineburg has called historical thinking “an unnatural act,” recognizing it “is neither a natural process nor something which springs automatically from psychological development.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, we know this ourselves as history lecturers because at one time, we were the students sitting in class reading primary sources and spending time in the library grappling with the historiography. We have developed our skills in close reading in a variety of different contexts and by using various sources over an extensive number of years. We know that it takes practice and dedication to sharpen our critical thinking skills. However, as Stéphane Lévesque has argued, history teachers have failed to articulate and communicate to students in the classroom the specific skills that historians use. Most courses are driven by the *need to know* the subject matter rather than focusing on the *skills that enable students to analyze* the subject matter. Lendol Calder and Tracy Steffes have argued,<sup>5</sup> similar to the logic of Wineburg and Lévesque, how favorable a shift in how we teach history in the university classroom would be, putting an emphasis on skills rather than content. Lévesque has clearly articulated the key skill sets which historians use to enable critical thinking when examining historical material. Historians evaluate and decide what are the most important events in the past, examine and assess change and continuity through time, measure and discuss the forces of progress and decay, and engage in the close reading, contextualizing, and corroboration of evidence. Lastly, historians practice historical empathy: We attempt to understand past actors without engaging in direct moral judgement through an imagined recreation and interpretation of the social values of the time period.<sup>6</sup> In the United Kingdom, these skills have been articulated in the subject benchmark statement for history, which defines historians’ skills and the qualities of mind which underpin all history courses at UK universities.<sup>7</sup>

As I was preparing to teach my course on the Jacobites in the summer of 2015, I was already aware of the argument that we should move towards a skill-based approach to teaching, which encourages students to be more active in their learning.<sup>8</sup> There were opportunities for me to put into practice a skills-based approach in class. These practice and skill-based approaches were undertaken in real time during class discussions and as part of the students’ continuous assessment, where they interacted with peers in the classroom. During the period of the course, there were three notable skills-based approach activities for the students to participate in. The first activity focused on the students’ ability to assess primary evidence within a wider historiographical context. This involved the students focusing on the skill of corroborating historical evidence amidst conflicting interpretations by historians. The second activity focused on developing a sense of historical empathy through the reassessment of the Duke of Cumberland and his men’s actions in the aftermath of Culloden. The third activity in the classroom intended to disrupt the students’ notion of progress and decline at the end of the Jacobite movement. I did this by asking students to act out the famous court case of *Knight v. Wedderburn*. This

<sup>4</sup> Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 7.

<sup>5</sup> Lendol Calder and Tracy Steffes, “Measuring College Learning in History,” in *Improving Quality in American Higher Education: Learning Outcomes and Assessments for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, eds. Richard Arum, Josipa Roksa, and Amanda Cook (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 40.

<sup>6</sup> Stéphane Lévesque, *Thinking Historically: Educating Students for the Twenty-First Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 39-52; 62-74; 87-103; 112-128; 142-161.

<sup>7</sup> Alan Booth, *Teaching History at University* (London: Routledge, 2003), 22-28; QQA Membership, *Subject Benchmarking Group: History* (December 2019), 9-10; Jennifer Clark and Adele Nye, “The Three Contexts of Writing about History Teaching” in Jennifer Clark and Adele Nye, eds., *Teaching the Discipline of History in the Age of Standards* (Singapore: Springer, 2018), 6-8.

<sup>8</sup> Jennifer Clark and Adele Nye, “Surprise Me! The (Im)possibilities of Agency and Creativity within the Standards Framework of History Education,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 49, no. 6 (2017), 666-668.

case involved a son of former Jacobite and turned enslaver Sir John Wedderburn against the enslaved Joseph Knight, resulting in a victory for Knight which led to the non-recognition of slavery under Scots law.

### **Building Confidence and Independence: Students and Primary Evidence**

At upper levels in a university degree program, students are expected to use more primary source materials and to use these sources to inform their secondary reading. There is also a progression toward allowing students to freely explore primary sources within their own individual small-scale projects, moving toward independent learning. From a teaching perspective, it marks a significant shift from lecturing toward continuous coursework.<sup>9</sup> In the spring of 2016, as I was marking essays and noticed a discrepancy in the number of primary sources that students were using, I became perplexed and concerned. I had provided a long list of primary sources with the course materials; these sources were accessible online, and physical copies were to be found easily within the library. Students were confident enough to tackle source material in class discussions, and some had even expressed enthusiasm for primary sources. So, what was the problem? After reviewing the essays, I realized that many of the students were comfortable extracting primary quotations from secondary sources as these quotations were provided with some form of context. I thought about this further and, putting myself in the students' position, realized that it was commonplace for them to analyze source material in class without any written context in class discussions beyond author, publication, and date. As a group they would collectively analyze the source, with one person offering a close analysis of the contents, another commenting on bias, and another providing some form of context. In addition, the material was already prepared for them in class; it was transcribed, ready to read, and rarely was it a full document. It made me realize that there was a lack of independence when seeking out and analyzing relevant primary source material, and this had stifled their confidence in dealing with primary sources on their own terms for their essays.

In order to try and build the students' confidence in dealing with primary sources, I designed an activity whereby, as individuals, they were to find a secondary article on the week's particular topic, analyze its contents, give a summary of its argument and, if possible, look into the background of the author and assess any bias within the article. The next part of the assignment asked students to read the footnotes, find an original primary source, and find it in its fully transcribed and printed form. In effect, I was getting the students to independently seek out primary sources of their choice, but with the "safety blanket" of the secondary source article. Once they obtained the primary source, I asked them to analyze it as they would do in class, but as an individual exercise. To bring the two elements of the assignment together, I asked the students to reflect on how the author had used the primary source in their secondary source article. The results of this exercise were presented in front of the class. As the weeks progressed, the class was independently expanding their knowledge of both primary and secondary sources in the field, and they were also learning the different ways historians integrate primary sources into their secondary analyses. As with all experiments in teaching, I was not sure if this exercise would have the desired result. However, to my delight and in contrast to the previous year, there was a far greater consultation of primary sources in the students' essays. Two students had even consulted manuscript sources in the university's special collections which confirmed that the assessment had achieved its aims.

### **In Defense of the Duke of Cumberland: Teaching Historical Empathy**

The second activity focused on developing students' skills in historical empathy by testing their ability to judge an event or an individual's actions within the context of their time. It has been argued that this is a powerful way to develop historical understanding in undergraduate classes.<sup>10</sup> For this exercise we had an open

---

<sup>9</sup> Geoff Timmins, Keith Vernon, and Christine Kinealy, *Teaching & Learning History* (SAGE Publications Ltd: London, 2005), 54-65.

<sup>10</sup> Stuart J. Foster and Elizabeth Anne Yeager, "The Role of Empathy in the Development of Historical Understanding," *International Journal of Social Education* 13, no. 1 (1998): 1-7; Elizabeth Anne Yeager, Stuart J. Foster, Sean D Malley, Thom Anderson, and James Morris III, "Why People in the Past Acted the Way They Did: An Exploratory Study in Historical Empathy,"



discussion and debate over the actions of William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, and his men in the aftermath of Culloden. This is a well-known controversial episode in eighteenth century British history. Since the middle of the twentieth century, debate has raged over the British army's conduct under the command of William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland. Historians such as John Prebble, Murray Pittock, and Bruce Lenman argue that the British army did indeed carry out atrocities in the aftermath of Culloden. Most recently, Stuart Reid and Jonathan Oates have argued that Cumberland operated within the standards of war at the time and refute the accusations of genocide.<sup>11</sup> I decided to bring this heated debate into the classroom.

The format of the discussion was framed around putting William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, on trial for potential war crimes. I acted as Cumberland's defense attorney, which drew raised eyebrows and folded arms from the students. A handful of the students were from parts of the Scottish Highlands where Cumberland and his men scoured for and killed Jacobites in arms. These students in particular were surprised and repulsed that a defense in favor of "Butcher Cumberland" could even be constructed—such was the strength of feeling against Cumberland in their own local areas fuelled by folk memory passed down from generation to generation. The students knew that I, too, had my own biases and folk memory to confront before assessing the evidence for and against Cumberland and his men. By this stage in the course, it was widely known amongst the students that my great uncle (seven times removed) was a high-profile Jacobite who was executed on Kennington Common in London in 1746, and I had other direct Jacobite ancestors who had founded Scaln Seminary in the Cairngorms, which was burnt to the ground in the aftermath of the '45 by Cumberland's troops.<sup>12</sup> By acting as Cumberland's defense in the trial, I led by example, showing that in order to develop a sense of historical empathy, we have to be aware of our own conscious and possible unconscious biases by removing ourselves from our own identities when assessing and considering a wide spectrum of evidence based on the reality of eighteenth-century warfare.

I then invited students in the room to put forward a counter argument that the Duke of Cumberland was indeed guilty of war crimes. Here stories emerged from local history in various parts of the Highlands, around Inverness, Fort Augustus, and Lochaber of the alleged atrocities that Cumberland and his men were said to have committed. When I asked the students the root of some of these stories, some had been taught them at school, some had been taken from local history books, others had been passed down through the family. Others were naturally ill disposed toward Cumberland based on his infamous reputation in Scotland alone. If someone is known as "Butcher Cumberland" throughout the Highlands, it must be justified, they reasoned. During our debate we broadly fleshed out the main points of the historiographical debate over the actions of the Duke of Cumberland and his men.

However, it did not end there, as we collectively peered behind these various stands and arguments on Cumberland. I was very keen for students to develop skills in evaluating historians' work in a similar way to primary source materials. In other words, I wanted students to read historians' works in the same way as they would read primary sources. In doing so, it would show that despite the primary evidence presented, historians do have conscious and unconscious biases of their own that feed into their analyses of particular events and people. We focused on Stuart Reid, a non-academic historian who is nonetheless a highly respected military historian. He is well-known for being one of Cumberland's most ardent defenders. We explored his Wikipedia entry together, which detailed that Stuart Reid was a Scot living in England and had ancestry who had fought at Culloden.<sup>13</sup> I then asked a key question – what information on this page would be central to informing his position on Cumberland? One student put forward the correct answer, that Stuart Reid had served in the British Army. I asked how this might impact upon his perspective. Another student suggested that he may still be loyal

---

*International Journal of Social Education* 13, no. 1 (1998): 8-24.

<sup>11</sup> John Prebble, *Culloden* (PIMLICO: London, 1961), 114-285; Murray Pittock, *Great Battles: Culloden* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2016), 99-115; Bruce Lenman, *The Jacobite Risings in Britain 1689-1746* (Scottish Cultural Press: Aberdeen, 1995), 260-282; Stuart Reid, *1745: A Military History of the Last Jacobite Rising* (Da Capo Press: Staplehurst, 1996), 173-182; Jonathan Oates, *Sweet William or The Butcher?* (Pen and Sword Military: Barnsley, 2008), 158-163.

<sup>12</sup> John Watts, *Scalan: The Forbidden College: 1716-1799* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1999), 94-95.

<sup>13</sup> Wikipedia, Stuart Reid (Scottish Historical Writer), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stuart\\_Reid\\_\(Scottish\\_historical\\_writer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stuart_Reid_(Scottish_historical_writer))

to the British army, which was a fair point, as Cumberland had commanded the British army at Culloden. I further suggested that, as a former serving soldier, Reid was the only one of our historians who had served in active combat in various war zones and this was key to informing his work on Cumberland. Reid understood the complexity and difficulty of such counter insurgency operations, the chain of command, military-civil relations, the thin lines between law, order, and oppression. At the end of the seminar, some students (but not all) had left the room convinced that William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland was not as bad as he has been remembered in recent popular memory. Students were far more aware of historical empathy, the biases of both primary and secondary sources, and the changing perspectives surrounding the Duke of Cumberland's reputation since the eighteenth century.

### Progress or Decline? The Jacobites and Slavery

The third activity geared toward skills focused on the ability to detect continuity and change but also to assess progress and decline. I was keen for students to explore the “afterlife” of the Jacobite movement as exiles went to Europe, Russia, and the Americas. In our penultimate seminar, I felt that it was important for the students to understand the connection between the Jacobites and the Atlantic slave trade. This was in 2016, long before the Black Lives Matters protests had engulfed the UK and USA in 2020. In 2016, there was already a growing awareness in Scotland of its links with the slave trade with a campaign calling for the full recognition of the tobacco and sugar trades in Glasgow and its links with slavery in North America and the Caribbean.<sup>14</sup> Nathaniel Davis, a scholar based in the UK, has argued that in teaching transatlantic slavery we should move beyond discussions about short term reasons for its abolition and emancipation by fitting the discussion in much a broader context and in a longer time span.<sup>15</sup> Here we were connecting the commonly known narrative of Jacobitism with its lesser-known connections with the transatlantic slave trade.

In class we examined the story of Joseph Knight, an enslaved person who came to Scotland under the ownership of a son of an executed Jacobite who became an enslaver, Sir John Wedderburn. Joseph Knight took his enslaver to court in Scotland and won, leading to the non-recognition of slavery in Scotland. Joseph Knight became a free man who lived out the rest of his days in Scotland.<sup>16</sup>

My reason for introducing the students to such a story was because it was a curious source of contradictions especially as the origins of the story lie within the Jacobite movement itself. Not only does the Jacobite story continue after Culloden, but I wanted to pour cold water over any sense of sympathy or romance that the students may have had for the Jacobites. Many of the *Outlander* fans in the class were horrified and shocked at the suggestion that had Jamie Fraser been sent to the Caribbean as an indentured slave, it was likely that he would have become a rich enslaver! However, I was keen for the students to explore the words, “freedom,” “oppression,” and “liberty” within the context of Jacobitism and within the context of the slave trade. How was it that a man who had fought for the Jacobite movement to free Scotland and its people from the Act of Union 1707, could then produce a son who became an enslaver? How could a man who saw the Gaelic culture, along with the Catholic and Episcopalian faiths destroyed, then destroy the lives of others? The students were asked to dramatize the court case between Sir John Wedderburn and Joseph Knight. The case notes allowed the students to see the positions of both parties as they were reported in court. This allowed students to hear both voices, the enslaved and the enslaver, in this landmark court case. It also allowed them to assess continuity and change

<sup>14</sup> Julie Gilbert, “Glasgow’s Shameful Link to the Slave Trade Remembered on International Slavery Day,” *Glasgow Live* 23 (August 2016), <https://www.glasgowlive.co.uk/news/glasgow-news/glasgows-shameful-link-slave-trade-11790114>; “Fresh Call for Memorial and Museum Recognizing Scotland’s Slave-Trade Links,” *The National* 4 October 2016, <https://www.thenational.scot/news/14896348.fresh-call-for-memorial-and-museum-recognising-scotlands-slave-trade-links/>

<sup>15</sup> Nathaniel Davies, “Staying with the Shot: Shaping the Question, Lengthening the Narrative, and Broadening the Meaning of Transatlantic Slavery,” *Teaching History* 80 (2020): 21-31.

<sup>16</sup> James Robertson, *Joseph Knight* (Harpercollins: London, 2003); Scottish Court of Session, *Decisions of the Court of Session from January 1778 to December 1781* (Edinburgh, 1791), see No III 15 January 1778, “Joseph Knight, a Negro Against John Wedderburn,” 5-9.



in the meaning of the terms “liberty,” “oppression,” and “freedom” in both contexts and see the contradictions, limitations, and complexities of the Jacobite movement in a new light. It had successfully disrupted the familiar perspectives about the decline of the Jacobite movement and opened up a debate about the notion of progress in the context of slave ownership and empire. Students enjoyed participating in the dramatization but also appreciated a more balanced approach to the Jacobite movement, especially those students from minority backgrounds.<sup>17</sup>

### **Beyond Classroom Walls: #TeamJacobite and #Team Hanoverian Go Global**

It is now recognized that millennials learn differently from previous generations due to the emergence of the internet and the new media. This generation has seamlessly used technology in all aspects of their life, and there have been calls to update teaching methods and history instruction to accommodate these developments and new learning preferences. Suggested activities in class include recreating events on Twitter as if they are happening in real time, the critical analysis of Tweets, feedback on presentations, and interclass support. Another suggestion is for a class discussion relayed on Twitter which invites those from outside the classroom to participate in.<sup>18</sup> This is something I did in the final week of the course with the agreement of the students. I was aware that tweeting conference papers was becoming commonplace in academia and wondered if this idea could be transferred into the classroom.

The final class discussion of the course was used as a way to reflect upon the course as a whole and take the long view on the Jacobite movement. However, in contrast to previous class discussions, we decided to post our discussion on Twitter, allowing the students to not only discuss the wider debates and consolidate their learning, but also to take pride in their learning by showcasing it to the outside world. I treated them as newly minted experts in the field by tagging influential and significant Jacobite scholars, whose books the students had been reading throughout the course, in our online debate. I had decided to split the class into two parts, #TeamHanoverian and #TeamJacobite. We used my own academic twitter account as the outlet to communicate to the academic community. Students who had their own Twitter accounts logged in, too, and supported their team with likes and comments. Framed similar to a school debate, there were opening shots and statements. I opened the discussion by declaring, “This House contends that the Jacobite Cause was an inevitable failure – do you agree?”<sup>19</sup> #TeamJacobite stated, “Jacobites posed a direct threat to the Hanoverian monarchy for many years.”<sup>20</sup> #TeamHanoverian opened their case by stating, “Jacobitism is a romantic idea rooted in a forlorn cause.”<sup>21</sup> It was an entirely student driven discussion with key points about the Jacobites and Hanoverians going back and forth online. The discussion was relaxed, fun, and interactive with comments from the leading academics. The students enjoyed this discussion immensely.<sup>22</sup> It demonstrated the power of social media to consolidate learning by allowing the students to become independent learners through debate whilst having fun in the process.

<sup>17</sup> As reported in annual course evaluation report, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Johannes Ahrenfelt, “Immersive Learning in the History Classroom: How Social Media Can Help Meet the Expectations of a New Generation of Learners,” in *Using New Technologies to Enhance Teaching and Learning in History*, ed. Terry Hayden (Routledge: Abingdon, 2013): 143-146; Kelly, *Teaching History in the Digital Age*, 11; 51; David R. Arndale, “Using Social Media Tools for Academic Support and Enrichment in the Classroom,” *NADE Digest* 9, no. 1 (2017): 8-12; Kathleen P. King, “Voice, Empowerment and Impact: Using Digital Technologies in the Classroom,” *The Professor’s Guide to Taming Technology*, eds. Kathleen P. King and Thomas Cox (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc., 2011): 15-30.

<sup>19</sup> Twitter @kirsteenmm, “This House Contents that the Jacobite Cause was an Inevitable Failure,” <https://twitter.com/kirsteenMM/status/798480083119996928?s=20>

<sup>20</sup> Twitter @kirsteenmm, “Opening Case #TeamJacobite,” <https://twitter.com/kirsteenMM/status/799575849716563968?s=20>

<sup>21</sup> Twitter @kirsteenmm, “Opening Case #TeamHanoverian,” <https://twitter.com/kirsteenMM/status/799576222565076992?s=20>

<sup>22</sup> Conclusions drawn from annual student course report, 2016.

## Towards Interactive Student Centered Learning: Designing an Online Jacobite Course for the Twenty-First Century

As the pandemic began in March 2020, many UK universities were forced to set up fully online versions of previously face-to-face courses. During this process, lectures were recorded and posted online and tutorials and seminars were conducted through Zoom and Microsoft Teams as online group meetings. In many respects, this online environment tried to replicate the face-to-face environment rather than significantly change teaching methods or instruction. However, some scholars have now questioned the efficacy of traditional teaching structures which have been in place for hundreds of years. Indeed, the skills-based approach to history teaching allows us to revisit and reflect upon age old methods and standards and question whether they teach the skills required in the twenty-first century.<sup>23</sup>

In 2020, I created a sample module for an online course using the latest methods in online teaching, digital humanities, and history pedagogy. For this exercise, I decided to create an online module on the Duke of Cumberland and the British Army's actions after Culloden. This was very much based on the class I had conducted on historical empathy on a face-to-face basis. However, I avoided setting up a like-for-like online replica of the face-to-face class that would have consisted of an online lecture and an online discussion. Instead, I took a whole new approach to designing a course based around the new technologies and the new media that focused squarely on developing skills sets which would enable students to think critically. The differences in the face-to-face course and the digital version are summarized in the table below:

**Table 1 – Traditional Teaching/Content and Online Skills-Based Teaching**

Face-to-Face	Digital
Nineteenth century methods; lectures and seminar discussions.	Twenty-first century approaches focusing on the completion of tasks which develop critical thinking skills.
Takes place on a physical campus and within a physical classroom at a prescribed time.	Fully online and asynchronous; no physical classroom and students can complete the tasks in their own time as long as they meet the final deadline.
Students discuss text-based sources.	Students work with a variety of different sources; audible, images, and films. This caters to a wider variety of different learning preferences. It allows for greater accessibility options for students with certain challenges.
Nineteenth century assessments; essays and exams. These follow academic conventions with limited transferable benefit outside academia.	Focuses on the development of generic critical thinking skills through “doing history.” These skills are transferable to the workplace and can be used more widely as a life skill applicable in a wide range of circumstances.

Under this new course model, the discussion moves from being teacher-led to student-led as students independently work through a series of tasks. Students work through each of the tasks within the module, effectively teaching themselves after the completion of each task.<sup>24</sup> Students can be drawn from across the globe and work together across time zones using a number of different devices such as laptops, other mobile devices, and desktops. It even allows students to complete the tasks whilst they are travelling from place to place. It is envisaged that the whole course would not have any fixed or scheduled classes, as is the case in a traditional setting. Instead, the class would have a series of flexible deadlines for the completion of tasks, as long as the

<sup>23</sup>Nastaran Peimani and Hesam Kamalipour, “Online Education and the COVID-19 Outbreak: A Case Study of Online Teaching During Lockdown,” *Education Sciences* 11 (2021); Paul Feldman, “Digital Transformation in Education: From Vision to Practice during the Pandemic,” in *Languages at Work, Competent Multilinguals, and the Pedagogical challenges of COVID-19*, A. Plutino and E. Polisca, eds. Research-publishing.net, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED612178>

<sup>24</sup>Kirsteen M. MacKenzie, “Online Portfolio,” <https://historianremote.net/>

students meet the final deadline for the course, allowing students to complete the course at their own pace. This allows for a flexibility which caters for a wider range of students that now exist in the twenty-first century such as working parents, single parents, mature students in full-time employment, or people with various disabilities and chronic illness who would otherwise be barred or inhibited from a traditional university education. The prototype for the module includes videos, images, and sounds related to Cumberland's actions after Culloden. This approach brings history alive, beyond black ink on a white piece of paper. For example, students use Google to explore the popular reputation of Cumberland and to critically evaluate the differences of opinion and information that they find. They are also encouraged to assess paintings in great detail and absorb the sounds of English and Scottish Gaelic folk music as they listen to authentic recreations of eighteenth-century folk songs. The module dispenses with traditional modes of assessment and focuses on critical thinking skills, such as empathy, evaluation and assessment of evidence, and an appreciation of cultural difference and conflict. These skills are essential to living in today's society and highlight the value of teaching eighteenth century history, or indeed any history, to positively shape people's lives thereby contributing to a healthy and happy society and democracy.

## Conclusion

From 2015 to 2021 I have significantly evolved in my approach to teaching eighteenth century history. I have moved from designing knowledge-based courses to skill-based courses. I have also experimented with new student assessments to solve problems or issues in student learning. I have focused on developing defined skills which all historians use regardless of specialization or field of interest. I have tried to teach historical empathy through leading by example and encouraging students to refrain from judging even one of the most unpopular figures from eighteenth century history too harshly and encouraging them to explore all sides of the historical debate regardless of personal biases or established reputation. My students began to view historians of the Jacobite wars as minefields of potential biases based on the historians' backgrounds. I introduced marginalized and often forgotten voices from history and in doing so disrupted the romantic image of the Jacobite exile. With this approach I hope that I showed my students what historians should be thinking and doing in the twenty-first century.

I have also made a concerted effort to integrate and use the new media in my university teaching as I recognize that a new generation of students has a different approach to learning than previous generations. Social media was used to consolidate learning through interactivity and fun. I see the new media and the digital technologies as being essential tools in my future as a history professional whether it be online course design and assessment or in the classroom face-to-face with the students. There are lessons here that can be applied beyond my own classroom. I have shown how easy it is to integrate the new technologies into a traditional face-to-face environment. We can frame student activities around developing historical skills whilst keeping the traditional seminar approaches to student learning. This article has also highlighted the importance and benefits of acknowledging the diverse student backgrounds in our classrooms and how this can help us build a more inclusive environment as well as providing the opportunity to embrace new approaches to our course content. Traditional forms of teaching eighteenth century history have fundamentally been challenged by the new technologies and pedagogical approaches. We have undergone significant evolutionary change. The way we teach eighteenth century studies today is far removed from the hallowed halls filled with men in the 1940s.

# TEACHING HISTORY FORUM: HISTORY WARS AND THE AMERICAN HISTORY SURVEY

## INTRODUCTION

Andrew Hartman

Illinois State University

Teaching History 46(2)

DOI: 10.33043/TH.46.2.28-29

© 2021 Hartman.

Distributed with [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

---

American History is in the news! A heated debate over how the history of the United States should be taught in the nation's public schools has overtaken the national public square, whether in opinion columns, cable news shows, talk radio programs, or a growing number of podcasts dedicated to discussions of politics and history. Our current history war has been brewing for years but has recently manifested in particularly heated form. This is due largely to the controversy surrounding the *1619 Project*, an award-winning curriculum published by the *New York Times* that places slavery at the heart of the narrative of American history.

The *1619 Project's* call for an intensified focus on race in the American history curriculum coincided with the national reckoning that has consumed the nation in the form of the Black Lives Matter movement. No wonder it won the Pulitzer Prize. But on the flip side, *1619* also landed at a moment when the nation's collective nerves were frayed by one crisis after another, from the incitements of the Donald Trump presidency, to the global pandemic, to the rightfully angry protests that emerged on streets across the nation following George Floyd's murder by police in the summer of 2020.

There has been a lot of push back against the *1619 Project* and related pedagogical projects such as Critical Race Theory, an academic postulation that emerged in the 1980s to explain the racist underpinnings of nominally colorblind institutions, especially the criminal justice system. Right-wing activists have flooded local school board meetings, angrily denouncing race-focused curriculum (while also loudly complaining about mask mandates, sex education, or whatever their *bête noire* happens to be that day).

Conservatives are not the only Americans expressing concern. A group of liberal and leftist historians object to the reductionist approach of the *1619 Project*. They especially oppose the argument made by the project's creator Nikole Hannah-Jones in her introductory essay, that the American Revolution was fought to protect slavery in the colonies (an example of the type of provocative revision the *1619 Project* seeks to have students contemplate). But those criticisms notwithstanding, the current history war has mostly played out in hyper-partisan terms. The Trump administration, for instance, organized a commission to respond to the *1619 Project*. The Trump commission, made up entirely of Republican operatives, right-wing activists, and conservative intellectuals, published the *1776 Report*, a profoundly problematic design for teaching American history that ignores a half-century or more of historical scholarship.

Although our contemporary history war feels especially contentious, it is nothing new. How the history of the United States is taught has always been a topic of debate, sometimes intense. In the early 1940s, conservatives successfully organized to remove from schools Harold Rugg's wildly popular textbook, *Man and His Changing Society*, which incorporated progressive historical scholarship that subjected the American past to the paradigm of class conflict.

History wars raged out of control during the 1990s. As scholars and educators worked to improve the curriculum by devising robust *National History Standards*, conservatives like Lynne Cheney and Rush Limbaugh railed against attempts to impose a politically correct narrative of American history on the nation's youth. The battle got even more heated when historians contributed to the creation of an exhibit about the *Enola Gay* that was intended for display at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum. Historians and museum curators wanted the exhibit to tell a balanced story about the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, reflective of decades of sound historical scholarship. Conservatives responded by leveling charges of anti-Americanism against the entire historical profession.

Our current national scrum over American history largely ignores the fact that we have been here before. It also misses the crucial detail, known to all good history teachers, that the narrative of American history, like all



history, is constructed. With this problem in mind, I turned my graduate seminar during the summer of 2021 over to the general topic of the American history narrative.

The Master's program in history at Illinois State University attracts lots of secondary history teachers, largely because our department is home to a large and rigorous History-Social Sciences Education program. Teachers are especially known to take our graduate seminars during the summer, when they have more time to focus on coursework. Aware that most of the students set to enroll in the course would be practicing teachers (indeed, ten of the twelve students who enrolled were teachers), and after thinking about how best to tackle this problem of the narrative of American history, I determined we would critically analyze the U.S. history survey.

One of the most powerful forms of constructing the American history narrative can be found in surveys of U.S. history, books assigned in high school and college classrooms that sometimes even attract readers beyond the classroom. In short, the course objective was to think deeply about the construction of the narrative of American history by reading, analyzing, and critiquing five of the most popular and intriguing U.S. history surveys, written from a diverse range of perspectives and with distinct objectives. We read, in the following order: Wilfred McClay, *Land of Hope: An Invitation to the Great American Story*; Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*; Jill Lepore, *These Truths: A History of the United States*; Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*; and Greg Grandin, *The End of the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America*. We also read the *1619 Project* and the *1776 Report*.

For their final papers, I asked students to write on any topic related to the course theme, with the goal of publishing some of the best papers as part of a forum for *Teaching History*. Five students rose to the occasion. The essays that follow represent a diverse range of approaches to answering the question: How should we organize the American history curriculum? Andrew Erford, a teacher at Bloomington High School in Bloomington, Illinois, uses the *1619 Project* as an example to make the case that we should teach history through historical argument. Chad Kuehn, who teaches at Fieldcrest High School in Minonk, shows the value of the *1619 Project* approach by demonstrating that the narrative of American history can be told through the lens of other landmark years, specifically, as he shows, 1968. Kelly Schrems, who also teaches at Bloomington High School, argues that organizing the American history curriculum around the theme of *protest* is an effective strategy for making the content relevant and engaging for her students. Hunter Watts, a teacher at Normal Community High School in Normal, Illinois, offers a knowledgeable critique of the anti-historical *1776 Report*. And finally, Cameron Zindars, who teaches at Mahomet-Seymour High School in Mahomet, Illinois, gives an overview of the history wars, past and present, before offering friendly advice to teachers as to how they might teach history in a meaningful way while also avoiding the pitfalls of the culture wars.

I hope readers learn as much from these essays as I did. As history teachers we often complain that our subject area gets overlooked, especially in an era of standardized testing when the focus tends to be on reading and math skills. But now, all eyes are on history. Of course, not in the way we might have wished! The apocryphal Chinese saying, "May you live in interesting times," is offered as both a blessing and a curse. Let us make the most of our interesting times. Let us bring a rigorous, exciting, critical version of the American history narrative to our students, future citizens of the United States.

# THE 1619 PROJECT AND THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND ARGUMENTATION IN THE HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSROOM

Andrew Erford  
Bloomington High School  
Bloomington, Illinois

Teaching History 46(2)  
DOI: 10.33043/TH.46.2.30-34  
© 2021 Erford.  
Distributed with [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

History has never simply been the study of a series of straightforward, unquestionable, and universal facts. Historians and importantly, students, engage in research and produce scholarship that brings meaning to the past through historical interpretation, analysis, and argumentation. In a recent iteration of America's culture wars—the history wars—a very public, vociferous, and often hostile debate rages, focusing on how history should be properly taught in American classrooms. Controversies surrounding *The New York Times Magazine's 1619 Project* typify one aspect of the current “history wars.” Editor Jake Silverstein and project creator Nikole Hannah-Jones, both journalists by training and trade, along with the other project authors, produced a work of popular historical scholarship arguing that the United States' origin story should be centered on the arrival of enslaved Africans on the English colonial shores in America in 1619.<sup>1</sup> This interpretation differs from several other approaches to American history.<sup>2</sup> By asserting that 1619 is the proper beginning to the American story, the *1619 Project* is merely positing an argument. This historical argument is controversial within the academy and across the mass media landscape. Whether it makes a strong or a weak argument, the *1619 Project's* thesis has much to offer students of history because it calls attention to historical argumentation, historical significance, and secondary sources.

Silverstein, Hannah-Jones, and the other essay authors argue that 1619 is the basis for discussing America's founding. In addition, Hannah-Jones asserted that the Revolutionary War was fought to protect the institution of slavery. Scholars pushed back. Prominent American historian Sean Wilentz was reportedly so enraged by the project's argument regarding the Revolutionary War that he threw his copy of *The New York Times Magazine* across the room upon reading it.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, former CEO of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and former social studies teacher, Janice K. Jackson was said to be left breathless after reading the *1619 Project's* interpretation.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, CPS decided to integrate the project into their social studies curriculum, and they received hundreds of copies of the publication for classroom use.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, school districts in other major cities decided to integrate the project into their social studies curriculums.<sup>6</sup> This news resulted in a legislative and media backlash, moving some to ban the project in schools and paint it as too radical for educational use.<sup>7</sup>

Most middle school or high school teachers have likely experienced rampant student demands to spend

---

<sup>1</sup> Jake Silverstein, “The 1619 Project,” *The New York Times Magazine*, August 18, 2019, 4; Nikole Hannah-Jones, “The 1619 Project,” *The New York Times Magazine*, August 18, 2019, 16-17.

<sup>2</sup> For example, see sociologist Matthew Desmond's essay contribution in which he argues that slavery has heavily impacted the modern American economy. This sparked intellectual criticism from a variety of perspectives: Phillip W. Magness, “The Case for Retracting Matthew Desmond's 1619 Project Essay,” *American Institute for Economic Research*, February 11, 2020, <https://www.aier.org/article/the-case-for-retracting-matthew-desmonds-1619-project-essay/>; Allen C. Guelzo, “The 1619 Project Tells a False Story About Capitalism, Too,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 8, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-1619-project-tells-a-false-story-about-capitalism-too-11588956387>; John Clegg, “How Slavery Shaped American Capitalism: The New York Times is Right That Slavery Made a Major Contribution to Capitalist Development in the United States — Just Not in the Way They Imagine,” *Jacobin*, August 28, 2019, <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/08/how-slavery-shaped-american-capitalism>

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Ellison, “How the 1619 Project took over 2020,” *The Washington Post*, October 13, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/1619-project-took-over-2020-inside-story/2020/10/13/af537092-00df-11eb-897d-3a6201d6643f\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/1619-project-took-over-2020-inside-story/2020/10/13/af537092-00df-11eb-897d-3a6201d6643f_story.html).

<sup>4</sup> Janice K. Jackson, “The 1619 Project and Chicago Public Schools,” *Inside CPS*, September 17, 2019, <https://blog.cps.edu/2019/09/17/the-1619-project-and-chicago-public-schools/>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Robby Soave, “Public Schools are Teaching The 1619 Project in Class, Despite Concerns from Historians,” *Reason*, January 28, 2020, <https://reason.com/2020/01/28/1619-project-new-york-times-public-schools/>

<sup>7</sup> Sarah Swartz, “Lawmakers Push to Ban ‘1619 Project’ From Schools,” *EducationWeek*, February 3, 2021.



valuable and limited class time watching or discussing the latest popular movie or discussing popular video games, memes, or sports. In the fall semester of 2020, during Zoom-based remote learning in the midst of a global pandemic, many of my students wanted to discuss the *1619 Project*, African American history, slavery, Jim Crow, institutionalized racism, Black Lives Matter, police brutality, cash bail inequity, and numerous other racially relevant topics. For all its omissions, factual errors, and its indictment by some historians as lacking intellectual rigor, the *1619 Project* not only inspired historical discussion among students and the public; it brought the concepts of historical significance and argumentation into the forefront of historical discussion. By asking students, “When did American history begin?” teachers can help students consider how and why we emphasize specific events and how they can use evidence to build arguments.

## Historical Significance

The *1619 Project* makes a historical argument with respect to historical significance. Luckily, various scholars, journalists, critics, and pundits have offered competing narratives about significant events and dates in U.S. history. These competing arguments are compelling fodder for student consumption and analysis. *1776 Unites*, an interdisciplinary and interprofessional project of ideologically and racially diverse thinkers has situated 1776 as the basis for studying American history, arguing that our founding principles and documents unite us as Americans and arguing against what they deem to be “grievance politics.”<sup>8</sup> Journalist Conor Friedersdorf takes a much softer approach, arguing that 1776 is the proper beginning of American history, because even America’s most ardent dissenters quoted the Declaration of Independence and the ideals it articulates, providing us with a shared foundation.<sup>9</sup>

In his recent book, *1620: A Critical Response to the 1619 Project*, former professor of anthropology and conservative journalist Peter W. Wood argues that 1620 and the Mayflower Compact represent the true founding of the United States.<sup>10</sup> The *New York Times*’ conservative opinion columnist, Ross Douthat, also situates U.S. origins within the colonial period. Douthat argues that the French and Indian War is one of the most important wars in world history and that it is far more important to American history than the Revolutionary War.<sup>11</sup> The *1619 Project* and its ensuing debate led *The Philadelphia Inquirer* to consult four historians to determine when the American story began.<sup>12</sup> Because the four historians present differing scholarly arguments regarding the beginning of American history within the same accessible article, students can easily read, write, and discuss the topic with minimal preparation. All of these authors are in conversation with the *1619 Project*, and their diverse perspectives should be embraced, rather than avoided. Engaging students in examining how authors build different positions is a valuable use of classroom time.

## Building Historical Arguments Through Questions

Effective history teachers typically rely on some form of “hook” to foster student interest, such as a controversial or funny image, video, or quote, or even a short activity to demonstrate an injustice or controversy. Beginning an American history course with a spirited debate over the question, “When did American history begin?” allows students to consider competing historical perspectives: those that are based on patriotism and the founding of the United States, those that focus on a specific demographic population, such as African Americans, and those that embrace American history prior to the arrival of Europeans on

<sup>8</sup> 1776 Unites, “Our Declaration,” *1776 Unites*, <https://1776unites.com/>

<sup>9</sup> Conor Friedersdorf, “1776 Honors America’s Diversity in a Way 1619 Does Not,” *The Atlantic*, January 6, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/01/inclusive-case-1776-not-1619/604435/>

<sup>10</sup> Peter W. Wood, *1620: A Critical Response to the 1619 Project* (New York: Encounter Books, 2020), 23-24.

<sup>11</sup> Ross Douthat, “The War That Made Our World,” *The New York Times*, July 13, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/13/opinion/french-indian-war-american-history.html>

<sup>12</sup> Staff Reports, “The 1619 Anniversary: Where Does the American Story Begin? Opinion,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 15, 2019.

American shores. Even within the focus on European arrival, perspectives differ, as some historians may focus on British, French, or Spanish colonialization, while others may focus on the Caribbean or Central and South American colonization by Europeans. Regardless, all of these perspectives have merits and faults, each presenting students with choices when formulating their historical arguments. This is not a new concept, nor is it particularly profound. However, students who are below grade level in literacy levels, students who demonstrate an average level of mastery in historical thinking, and students who are the highest motivated and highest achieving in the history classroom can all access and benefit from considering the following questions and amassing evidence to build their argument:

- When did American history begin?
- When is the true founding of the United States?
- When does the American story begin?

Likewise, the same instructional approach can be applied to defining the idea of America:

- What is America?
- What is an American?
- What does it mean to be an American?
- Where is America?
- How has America influenced and shaped the rest of the world?

Teaching history and social studies in the K-12 classroom is always a challenging endeavor. It is impossible to “cover” everything in history in a single academic year, and even seven years of instruction across middle school and high school are not enough time to cover the entirety of American and world history, as well as civics, geography, economics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and various other electives. The use of simple, fundamental questions, whether using time, place, or definition, offers students the opportunity to apply historical thinking skills, employ historical arguments, and engage historical controversies in a straightforward manner that is compatible with the time limitations and often chaotic nature of K-12 teaching and learning in the United States.

### **Student-Centered Classrooms to Promote Building Arguments**

One of the most damning critiques of history and social studies education in the United States is that students are not the driving force in most classrooms. The use of significance as a starting point for teaching and learning history and engaging students in building arguments aligns with Paulo Freire’s argument against “banking” models of education that keep content in the hands of the instructor. As Freire points out, peasants typically identify themselves as ignorant and see their teachers as those who have the knowledge that they need. Freire notes that they rarely believe they know things that are relevant to what is being studied.<sup>13</sup> The obvious benefit of all types of inquiry-based teaching and learning is that it pushes back against the inherently teacher-centered forms of instruction that most often take root in K-12 classrooms. When students drive the learning process by engaging fundamental questions, students are able to assert their agency and tailor their historical education to their needs. History textbooks and lecture-based history often lead with essential questions, but then follow with answers. This approach teaches students that there is either one correct answer to every historical question, or it influences students to fall in line with arguments presented by their teachers and/or textbooks. If the goal of history and social studies education in the United States is to produce citizens capable of thinking critically about our shared past, present, and future, then students need to become adept at engaging difficult historical questions and developing strong historical arguments that they believe in. In other words, parroting reflexive responses to historical questions that use one or more primary sources to “prove” an argument does not have

---

<sup>13</sup> Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition (New York: Continuum, 2005), 63.

the same value or rigor as interrogating the question of when American history began. Student arguments and products, such as their verbal and written responses, are likely to be sloppy and look nothing like graduate and professional historical scholarship, but that is okay. Students benefit when they think big and attempt to place themselves and others within the context of history. The *1619 Project* and the competing reactions it inspired are useful because they are not final answers to historical questions. Rather, they can engage students in a perpetual conversation of historical study.

### The Value of Secondary Sources

Former President Trump's short-lived 1776 Commission, which produced the *1776 Report*, places immense importance upon producing good American citizens and the teaching and learning of facts within the study of history and social studies. The commission argues that we must "reject false and fashionable ideologies that obscure facts, ignore historical context, and tell America's story solely as one of oppression and victimhood rather than one of imperfection but also unprecedented achievement toward freedom, happiness, and fairness for all."<sup>14</sup> The commission also argues that civics and government education should "rely almost exclusively on primary sources."<sup>15</sup> This a subtle, yet substantial argument against the use of secondary sources in social studies instruction. When students traffic in historical argumentation, they are joining the discourses contained within various historiographies. Though primary sources are undoubtedly important to the study of history, so is the wonderfully diverse library of secondary analysis.

To the members of the 1776 Commission, students become damaged goods when they read thinkers such as Howard Zinn, Noam Chomsky, Ayn Rand, Karl Marx, Paulo Freire, and Max Weber. But, students are only damaged when they read secondary sources as an/the end truth. Otherwise, students grow by adding more and more perspectives to their understanding of history. Reading Hitler's *Mein Kampf* does not make the reader a Nazi, nor does reading Marx's *Communist Manifesto* make the reader a communist. However, reading either text as absolute truth can be detrimental.

Textbook publishers are notoriously bad at engaging Native American history and incorporating Native Americans into their for-profit textbooks. Students reap only benefits by reading and discussing Native American scholars such as Vine Deloria, Jr., Nick Estes, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, David Treuer, Dino Gilio-Whitaker, and Thomas King. Students can benefit even more by juxtaposing these scholars' arguments with those posited by previous generations of Native American scholars, finding where they agree, disagree, and what they ignore. Excerpts, book chapters, and articles are as easily consumed by students as primary source documents, which are often difficult due to the unfamiliar writing styles and vocabulary words employed by the authors. The 1776 Commission appears to have an interest in keeping students away from secondary sources, such as the *1619 Project*, which make historical arguments with which students can easily engage.

### Conclusion

No historian or social studies educator has unequivocally found the perfect approach to teaching history. Not every student will respond to even the most controversial, fun, and/or exciting readings and instructional activities. A simple and affordable way to engage students at the beginning of a history course and at the beginning of units and modules is to work through questions of when, where, and what. This demonstrates the importance of historical perspective, interpretation, and argument, easily dispelling the notion that studying history is merely the acquisition of a series of irrefutable facts. It also naturally provides students with agency, as their arguments take center stage, while still requiring students to engage primary and secondary sources and support their arguments with evidence. Because of this, the *1619 Project* is not an evil or indoctrinating document that will damage those students who read and examine it. Nor is it a publication that an entire curriculum should be centered around—American history is just too vast to center around any single text. It is

---

<sup>14</sup>The President's Advisory 1776 Commission, "The 1776 Report," January 2021, 18.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 38.

merely another great contribution to the historiography of American history. The *1619 Project*, with every other worthy historical argument, needs to be discussed, critiqued, and defended, rather than censored or placed upon a divine intellectual pedestal.



# 1968: A THEMATIC INQUIRY

Chad Kuehnl  
Fieldcrest High School  
Minonk, Illinois

Teaching History 46(2)  
DOI: 10.33043/TH.46.2.35-40  
© 2021 Kuehnl.  
Distributed with [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

---

In the study of United States history, many iconic years have come to define America. In recent years, several thematic based projects have attempted to use these years to reshape the American narrative. *The 1619 Project*, developed by Nikole Hannah-Jones and the *New York Times* has called for Americans to “reframe the country’s history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of our national narrative.”<sup>1</sup> The conservative response by the Trump Administration led to *The 1776 Report* as a way to promote patriotic education by “cultivating a better education among Americans in the principles and history of our nation.”<sup>2</sup> Other years such as 1877, which brought about the end of Reconstruction, are also gaining attention in light of recent events. Decades of police brutality aimed at African Americans, highlighted in part with the murders of George Floyd and Breanna Taylor, have shown that the failure to protect Reconstruction’s goals and defend African Americans from racial terror have created many of the issues that we deal with today. While the previously mentioned years are deserving of academic study, the year 1968 demands our attention as a way to understand present day America. The aim of this article is to promote a thematic unit of study of the year 1968 and its connections to the present day by investigating themes such as national identity, domestic politics, and foreign affairs. Students will then be able to consider the direct impact of 1968 on our current political and cultural climate as well as the impact on their lives.

## Rationale for 1968 as a Theme for United States History

The year 1968 has come to represent the larger themes in U.S. History that have shaped the nation’s narrative including struggles for racial and gender equality, protest movements, and the impact of war on American society. At bare minimum, 1968 represents a tumultuous time in United States history that was the culmination of two decades of domestic and foreign challenges. At its most extreme, the United States of 1968 was, in the words of Eldridge Cleaver, shaping the “destiny of the entire human race.”<sup>3</sup>

The continual fight for racial equality is quite visible in 1968. Events such as the Howard University protests, which called for an implementation of black studies and reforms at the institutional level, highlight 1968 as a year in which a black consciousness was being raised. This fits into the larger theme of tackling American racism while demonstrating the nuances in the aims of the Civil Rights Movements’ activists. In this moment, African American students fought to elevate the racial narrative within American institutions as opposed to the centuries long battle for inclusion into the institutions themselves.

The ongoing battle for gender equality in the American narrative reached new levels with the shift of the feminist movement in 1968. With the phrase, “the personal is political,” radical feminist Carol Hanisch and other women from across the nation tackled “antiquated, misogynistic attitudes toward women and beauty, but also to how the United States, as a whole, treated women.”<sup>4</sup> This culminated with a march against the 1968 Miss America pageant that brought about a new wave in feminism. This moment in 1968 is symbolic of the large theme of activism toward gender equality as it can be traced to earlier generations of women’s fight for a place in the democratic system. The activism of 1968 is still present in equality movements of today. Marches such as the 2017 Women’s March on Washington, which was held in response to President Donald Trump’s “misogynistic”

---

<sup>1</sup>Nikole Hannah-Jones, “The 1619 Project,” *The New York Times Magazine*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html>

<sup>2</sup>The President’s Advisory 1776 Commission, “The 1776 Report,” January 2021.

<sup>3</sup>Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1968).

<sup>4</sup>Roxane Gay, “Fifty Years Ago, Protesters Took on the Miss America Pageant and Electrified the Feminist Movement,” *Smithsonian Magazine* (January/February 2018), <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/fifty-years-ago-protestors-took-on-miss-america-pageant-electrified-feminist-movement-180967504/>

comments and remarks that attacked “people of color, immigrants, and the LGBTQ+ community,” demonstrates 1968’s place in the larger theme of the American struggle for equality.<sup>5</sup>

The year 1968 also claims one of the most iconic moments regarding the theme of war and protest in the American narrative. While many U.S. wars had their dissenting moments, few had the long-term impact of the protests at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago, Illinois. Spurned in part by disagreement over the Vietnam War, especially after the Tet Offensive earlier in the year, “many people began to believe that the U.S. government was no longer a democracy, but had become an illegitimate institution led by ‘war criminals’ and enforced by ‘the pigs.’”<sup>6</sup> This belief led to clashes between protestors and Chicago Police officers and the Illinois National Guard. Protestors shouted, “The whole world is watching, the whole world is watching!” Unfortunately for the protestors, Americans did not respond in the way the protestors had hoped they would. America elected Nixon under a law-and-order campaign, and the Vietnam War continued. Americans continued to protest and by 2014, in the context of protests in Ferguson, Missouri over the fatal police shooting of unarmed African American teenager Michael Brown, the world of today not only responded but reacted in ways not available in 1968. With the rise of social media, protestors from all over the globe tweeted advice to Ferguson about how to deal with a militarized police force. With live stream technology that can circumvent mainstream media, “Ferguson is a good reminder that when the whole world watches now, it is looking through a seemingly infinite number of lenses.”<sup>7</sup> This technological evolution in American protest was magnified with the sentencing of Minneapolis officer Derek Chauvin after the murder of George Floyd in 2020. Darnella Frazier, who recorded Floyd’s murder, would receive praise for her “bravery and quick thinking in capturing the video that they say made the guilty verdict possible.”<sup>8</sup>

1968 can undoubtedly be seen as a year that speaks about our American themes as whole. When reflecting on the year 1968, *Time* magazine commented that “historians’ turning-point years involve wars and revolutions, not peaceful change. Clearly, 1968 is already a year for the history books; if it becomes a really major entry, the reason will be that Americans failed to solve too many of the minor problems that eventually cause major explosions.”<sup>9</sup> This quote is central to why 1968 is emblematic of the themes in American history. By studying the themes of America through the year 1968, students can see how the bigger themes of race, gender, war, and conflict are reflected in our nation today as they to fight to solve America’s generational and ongoing thematic issues.

## 1968 to Today – A Thematic Inquiry

Through a thematic inquiry into major events of 1968, students will answer the following major question: What does 1968 mean to the creation of the current American identity? The 1968 theme will have three subtopics of study which promote exploration into the people and events that shaped the year 1968. A final open-ended document based summative assessment will allow the students to demonstrate how they see connections and differences between 1968 and our current American identity.

<sup>5</sup> National Museum of American History, “The Women’s March, 2017,” <https://americanhistory.si.edu/creating-icons/women%E2%80%99s-march-2017>

<sup>6</sup> Terry M. Anderson, “1968: The End and the Beginning in the United States and Western Europe,” *South Central Review* 16/17 (1999), 12.

<sup>7</sup> Robyn Urback, “Ferguson Authorities Don’t Have a Monopoly on Information. The Sooner They Realize That, The Better,” August 18, 2014, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/robyn-urback-ferguson-authorities-dont-have-a-monopoly-on-information-the-sooner-they-realize-that-the-better>

<sup>8</sup> Rachel Treisman, “Darnella Frazier, Teen Who Filmed Floyd’s Murder, Praised for Making Verdict Possible,” April 21, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/sections/trial-over-killing-of-george-floyd/2021/04/21/989480867/darnella-frazier-teen-who-filmed-floyds-murder-praised-for-making-verdict-possib>

<sup>9</sup> “What a Year!” *Time*, August 30, 1968.

### *National Identity and the Struggle for Equality*

In this subtopic, the students will answer the following question: Are major events in the struggle for equality from the year 1968 mirrored in our society's activism today? In 1968, support for the Civil Rights Movement was dwindling, and the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. also hampered the movement. Still, the struggle for racial equality moved forward. One of the most monumental moments was the Poor People's Campaign, which was meant to be "a new co-operation, understanding, and a determination by poor people of all colors and backgrounds to assert and win their right to a decent life and respect for their culture and dignity."<sup>10</sup> While the campaign's goals were not fully achieved, the aims of the campaign "remain the most visionary and brilliant strategy to overcome poverty ever put forth in our nation."<sup>11</sup> This campaign has had a revival in 2021 with a new march calling on Americans to "resist the extremist and monied powers that want to deny, abridge, and undermine all of our votes."<sup>12</sup> By examining these two versions of the Poor People's campaign, students can examine the relevance of this campaign both in 1968 and today and reflect on their commonality.

One of the more successful movements of 1968 came from Latino high school students in East Los Angeles who walked out of their classrooms to address racism. Student demands for educational reform included increases in school funding and more attention to Mexican history and culture. The long-term results of the walkouts led to an increase in Mexican American teachers and administrators coupled with an increase in Latino enrollment in higher learning institutions throughout the 1970's. By having students explore the legacy of these walkouts, they will appreciate their own generation's student activism. This is especially true regarding the March for our Lives campaign, led in part by student activist X Gonzalez (born Emma Gonzalez), who marched to pressure lawmakers to address gun violence and support gun control legislation in the aftermath of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in 2018. The fact that activists in both events are of the same age as the students will help further a connection to the people and causes that were being fought for in 1968 and today.

Gains were also being made on gender frontiers. Shirley Chisholm became the first black woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. In 1968, five thousand women took part in the Jeannette Rankin Brigade March, led by the 87-year-old congresswoman herself, to protest the Vietnam War. It has been reported that the slogan, "Sisterhood is Powerful," was coined by Kathie Sarahchild at this march, pushing forward the feminist movement into the 1970's and beyond. The impact of the movement has permeated into 21st century activism with Tarana Burke's #MeToo Movement whose goals include "healing through engagement in community organizing, where survivors are empowered to fight sexual violence with courage and conviction."<sup>13</sup> Students will be able to connect the impact of women's activism of 1968 with the 21st century movements toward gender equality.

### *Domestic Political & Economic Issues*

In this subtopic, students will be answering the following question: Are major political and economic moments from 1968 still shaping U.S. politics and social issues today? By utilizing their own familiarity with the recent 2020 election, students will see how public opinion can impact the political actions of Presidential candidates and even reshape the political direction of a nation. Students will also explore differences between the economic issues of 1968 and the present day and their impact on society.

Two months before the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Kerner Commission, sponsored

---

<sup>10</sup> Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Press release, "Black and White Together," March 15, 1968.

<sup>11</sup> Terry Messman, "The Poor People's Campaign: Non-Violent Insurrection for Economic Justice," *Race, Poverty & the Environment* 14, no. 1 (2007), 30.

<sup>12</sup> "Poor People's Campaign Embarks on 4-day, 27-mile 'Moral March' for Democracy in Texas," *The Black Wall Street Times*, July 27, 2021, <https://theblackwallstimes.com/2021/07/27/poor-peoples-campaign-embarks-on-4-day-27-mile-moral-march-for-democracy-in-texas/>

<sup>13</sup> "Vision & Theory of Change," <https://metoomvmt.org/get-to-know-us/vision-theory-of-change/>

by President Lyndon B. Johnson and led by Governor Otto Kerner Jr. of Illinois, declared that the nation was “moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.”<sup>14</sup> The Johnson administration failed to react to this prophetic statement, and later that year Richard Nixon used a law-and-order campaign to win the presidency. The legacy of this missed opportunity to address racial inequality can still be seen today. For example, the aims of the Black Lives Matter movement include addressing persistent racism, discrimination, and inequality experienced by African Americans. President Donald Trump’s reactions in 2020 were dismissive and counter-reactionary. Trump himself tweeted that a proposed BLM sign on New York’s Fifth Avenue was a “symbol of hate.”<sup>15</sup>

Students can also explore the 1968 election itself to examine how the platform shifts of both parties that took place during the election still impact the political platforms today. Democratic nominee Hubert H. Humphrey’s loss paved the way for a party split. This split eventually moved the Democratic party to embrace “a more liberal foreign policy perspective and a greater appreciation for social justice issues.” Republican Richard Nixon’s initial use of the Southern Strategy, to gain the votes of individuals who opposed school desegregation and the votes of northern whites, still resonates on the direct impact of our political parties’ platforms today. Trump would also apply tactics used by Nixon when stoking fears of racial integration. During the 2020 Presidential campaign, Trump made the statement that he was “happy to inform all of the people living their Suburban Lifestyle Dream that you will no longer be bothered or financially hurt by having low-income housing built in your neighborhood.”<sup>16</sup> This appeal to white conservative suburban voters was another attempt to flame decades old fears of poor Blacks flooding into white neighborhoods. With a comparison of 1968 to today regarding domestic policy, students are given the opportunity to inquire on how much we shape the political agenda or how much the political agenda shapes our thinking on political and social issues.

This 1968 thematic unit can also explore stark differences from the present day. In 1968, wages were rising, and unemployment was dropping. In December 1968, *Time* magazine noted that “the median income of a U.S. family of four has risen fifty-four percent” while “unemployment has dropped to a fifteen-year low of three point three percent.”<sup>17</sup> Overall, numbers have remained consistent with the numbers from 1968. Even with an ongoing pandemic, the U.S. unemployment rate was at just over five percent as of July 2021.<sup>18</sup> The median income of 2021 was at \$79,900 as of April 2021.<sup>19</sup> However, when minimum wages and racial inequality are compared from 1968 to today, the numbers reveal a more concerning and different picture. The minimum wage of 1968 was \$1.60, or \$12.90 in today’s dollars. The federal minimum wage has remained at \$7.25 an hour since 2009, exacerbating America’s ongoing wage inequality over the last decade. According to the Brookings Institute, “forty-four percent of U.S. families in 2019 did not earn an income that was high enough to cover their families’ living expenses.”<sup>20</sup> When race is factored in, the numbers become more alarming. When looking at 1968 and present-day median family income, “African American family income was fifty-seven percent of the median white American family income. In 2016, the ratio was fifty-six percent.”<sup>21</sup> In April 2020, with the pandemic

<sup>14</sup>National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, “Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders: Summary of Report,” (United States: Government Printing Office, 1968), 1.

<sup>15</sup>“President Trump Calls Proposed Black Lives Matter ‘Sign’ in NYC ‘Symbol of Hate,’” <https://abc7ny.com/black-lives-matter-symbol-of-hate-mural-in-nyc-trump-calls-a-fifth-avenue/6288343/>

<sup>16</sup>“Trump Stokes Racist Fears After Revoking Obama-Era Housing Rule Intended to Fight Segregation,” <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trump-stokes-racist-fears-revoking-obama-era-housing/story?id=72074862>

<sup>17</sup>“The Economy in 1968: An Expansion That Would Not Quit,” *Time*, December 27, 1968.

<sup>18</sup>Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2021, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empst.pdf>

<sup>19</sup>U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2021, <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/il/il21/HUD-sec236-2021.pdf>

<sup>20</sup>Sifan Liu and Joseph Parilla, “How Family Sustaining Jobs Can Power an Inclusive Recovery in America’s Cities,” Brookings, February 18, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/how-family-sustaining-jobs-can-power-an-inclusive-recovery-in-americas-cities/>

<sup>21</sup>Robert Manduca, “Income Inequality and the Persistence of Racial Economic Disparities,” *Sociological Science* 5 (2018), 182.



raging, less than half of African Americans adults were employed.<sup>22</sup> By focusing on the economic differences between 1968 and the present day, students will see how the nation has struggled to meet the needs of low-income families for decades. Students can also explore how 1968's economic issues such as "growth-inducing tax cuts, an escalating war in Vietnam, and increased social spending at home had overstrained economic institutions and capabilities" crippling President Johnson's Great Society programs and impacting American minorities' financial standing up through the present day.

### *Foreign Affairs*

Students can also explore foreign affairs of 1968 and today and investigate connections and differences. Student familiarity with recent issues such as immigration, the war in Afghanistan, and the COVID-19 pandemic, will help to guide the students' focus with the following subtopic question: Are responses to foreign affairs from 1968 still shaping how we respond to foreign affairs today? Foreign affairs and the election of 1968 echo today as "few elections in U.S. history were so dominated by foreign policy and few elections so affected foreign policy during a campaign."<sup>23</sup> Both campaigns had to convince voters that they would bring peace by ending the Vietnam War. This was driven by Walter Cronkite's negative critique of the war's progress, especially after the Tet Offensive, which exposed Johnson's false claims that the U.S. was winning. Nixon had "managed to combine peace with toughness without exactly saying how he would bring peace or where he would get tough," demonstrating to the public that his path was vastly different than the path Johnson was taking and that a Democratic successor of Johnson would presumably follow.<sup>24</sup> This strategy can be seen as well in the words of Donald Trump during his 2016 bid for the presidency. As early as June 2015, Trump commented that he "will build a great, great wall on our southern border, and I will make Mexico pay for that wall. Mark my words."<sup>25</sup> Trump took a play from the Nixon campaign to look tough on a foreign affairs issue without laying out a detailed plan. Students can compare these responses to foreign affairs and consider how our politicians have or have not changed in responding to calls for action by the general public.

The Vietnam War can be used to distinguish differences from 1968 and today. As the media exposed the reality of the Vietnam War, support began to wane. At the beginning of the year, polling "showed that about fifty-three percent of the public supported the war. By the end of the year, fifty-eight percent opposed it."<sup>26</sup> In regard to the war in Afghanistan, "Gallup surveys tracking Americans' perceptions of previous wars, including Iraq, Vietnam, and Korea, have found majorities at some point describing those efforts as a mistake, something that has not occurred with respect to Afghanistan."<sup>27</sup> Students can explore why this two decade long conflict never had the same resentment that the Vietnam War had against it even though only "twenty percent of U.S. adults say they trust the government in Washington to "do the right thing" just about always or most of the time."<sup>28</sup> As students are often engulfed in social media on a continual basis, an inquiry can be made on the reaction to media and warfare. While today's youth have always had the ups and downs of the war in Afghanistan illustrated

---

<sup>22</sup> Heather Long and Andrew Van Dam, "The Black-White Economic Divide is as Wide as It Was in 1968," *The Washington Post*, June 4, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/06/04/economic-divide-black-households/>

<sup>23</sup> Melvin Small, "The Election of 1968," *Diplomatic History* 28, no. 4 (September 2004), 528.

<sup>24</sup> Nelson W. Polsby, *Presidential Elections*, 5th ed. (New York: Scribner's, 1980), 174.

<sup>25</sup> Glenn Kessler, "A History of Trump's Promises that Mexico Would Pay for the Wall, Which It Refuses to Do," *The Washington Post*, January 8, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/live-updates/trump-white-house/live-fact-checking-and-analysis-of-president-trumps-immigration-speech/a-history-of-trumps-promises-that-mexico-would-pay-for-the-wall-which-it-refuses-to-do/>

<sup>26</sup> Michael McGrath, "Beyond Distrust: When the Public Loses Faith in American Institutions," *National Civic Review* 106, no. 2 (Summer 2017), 47.

<sup>27</sup> Megan Brennan, "Americans Split on Whether Afghanistan War Was a Mistake," July 26, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/352793/americans-split-whether-afghanistan-war-mistake.aspx>

<sup>28</sup> Pew Research Center, "Americans' Views of Government: Low Trust, But Some Positive Performance Ratings," September 14, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/09/14/americans-views-of-government-low-trust-but-some-positive-performance-ratings/>

to them through online media, the decline in the support for the Vietnam War was a “reflection of being better informed about what the war was costing (e.g., via pictures of dead and wounded Americans)” which had never happened previously during an ongoing war.<sup>29</sup>

## Conclusion

After considering the supporting questions, students will return to the larger question: What does 1968 mean to the creation of the current American identity? Students will make their case to the larger thematic question through a final paper or visual presentation. This process allows the students to demonstrate how they understand the connections and differences between 1968 and our current American identity. Students must demonstrate connections by utilizing primary source documents from 1968 and today to construct an argument regarding the legacy of 1968 with respect to equality, domestic politics, and foreign affairs. While the academic goal of this thematic unit is to give relevance to 1968 as a landmark year, the overreaching goal is to help the students gain connections with moments in history and establish long lasting connections with them as they investigate 1968’s influence on their lives today. By designing a thematic unit and allowing students to explore history in this manner, the hope is that the students have gained a deeper understanding of how the American narrative is still a living part of the moments of years gone by.

---

<sup>29</sup>H. M. Schrieber, “Anti-War Demonstrations and American Public Opinion on the War in Vietnam,” *The British Journal of Sociology*, 27, no. 2 (June 1976), 231.

# PROTEST AS AN AMERICAN TRADITION: NARRATIVE DISCOURSE IN THE AMERICAN HISTORY SURVEY

Kelly Schrems  
Bloomington High School  
Bloomington, Illinois

Teaching History 46(2)  
DOI: 10.33043/TH.46.2.41-44  
© 2021 Schrems.  
Distributed with [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

In 1994, on his radio talk show, Rush Limbaugh said, “History is real simple. You know what history is? It’s what happened.” Limbaugh made this argument amidst debates concerning the role that politicization plays within history curricula, suggesting that history should be taught in matter-of-fact terms.<sup>1</sup> Yet, in that statement alone, Limbaugh exposed his complete disengagement with history as an academic discipline. Historiography, the process that professional historians engage with, assumes an ever-changing nature to the discipline. In the simplest terms: historians use facts to form arguments. Oftentimes, different historians will use the same facts in forming conflicting arguments. James Loewen, in *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, states, “History is a furious debate informed by evidence and reason. Textbooks encourage students to believe that history is facts to be learned.”<sup>2</sup> Here, Loewen flaunts the disconnect that exists between history, the academic discipline engrained with controversy, and history, the watered-down, textbook version that puts teenagers to sleep.

An analysis of three surveys of American history, ranging in publication date from 1999-2020, reveals that historians achieve different means in their varying portrayals of the same events. For instance, in his controversial, groundbreaking synthesis of American social history, *A People’s History of the United States*, Howard Zinn suggests that the Spanish-American War was fought to distract American workers from socialist revolt, quoting a socialist newspaper of the time: “. . . war was ‘a favorite method of rulers for keeping the people from redressing domestic wrongs.’”<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, in a more “patriotic,” political history of the United States, *Land of Hope: An Invitation to the Great American Story*, Wilfred McClay suggests that the United States sought to educate, uplift and “help” those left in the wake of Spanish colonial rule.<sup>4</sup> Different still, Greg Grandin suggests, in *The End of the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America*, that fighting the Spanish-American War was a means to reunite the Northern and Southern sects of the nation still reeling from the Civil War and Reconstruction: “War with Spain allowed ‘our boys’ to once more ‘be wrapped in the folds of the American flag. . . .’”<sup>5</sup> There is little consensus among these historians concerning the ambitions of the Spanish-American War, other than the fact that it happened. However, simply stating that “it happened,” as Limbaugh suggests, lacks contextualization and makes for a pretty boring history lesson.

Of the survey texts mentioned above, Grandin’s *An End to the Myth* does something quite different through its use of thematic history. Grandin provides a “through-line,” a focus alongside chronology with which to organize his narrative. Grandin builds his narrative around the myth of the frontier, the idea that America was exceptional in its ability to expand westward, claiming that the “imagery [of the frontier] could easily be applied to other arenas of expansion, to markets, war, culture, technology, science, the psyche, and politics.”<sup>6</sup> Using this through-line, Grandin showcases how Americans have avoided domestic issues by looking to the “frontier,” or issues that could be tackled outside their own dominion. The argument is most compelling because Grandin believes that the frontier myth came to an end with Donald Trump’s discussion of a border wall. America must

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 273.

<sup>2</sup> James Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney & New Delhi: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States* (New York: HarpersCollins Publishers, 2003), 307-308.

<sup>4</sup> Wilfred M. McClay, *Land of Hope: An Invitation to the Great American Story* (New York & London: Encounter Books, 2020), 236-239.

<sup>5</sup> Greg Grandin, *The End of the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2019), 136-138.

<sup>6</sup> Grandin, *An End to the Myth*, 3.

now, according to Grandin, face inward to reckon with our domestic issues of race, violence, and exploitation.

Eric Foner, another renowned historian, similarly structures *The Story of American Freedom* suggesting that the concept of “freedom” can be traced, as a through-line, from the founding of the nation into the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Foner’s analysis is intriguing as he claims that “freedom” is not a constant for all Americans and does not have a consistent definition. Rather, freedom was molded to fit the context of the time.<sup>7</sup> Foner’s most impressive strength throughout the work is his claim that freedom guaranteed to some means freedom denied to others, resting much of his argument on the understanding that subjugation has been a consistent tool in the maintenance of freedom: “This idea of freedom, it seems, requires an antithesis...”<sup>8</sup> Foner’s focus on a constantly changing “freedom,” inherent for some and denied to others, lends itself to his inclusiveness of groups oftentimes ignored in the American story, including African Americans, women, immigrants, labor activists, and Native Americans.

Both Grandin and Foner cover the basics. They both discuss the nation’s founding. They both recognize the horrors of slavery. They both acknowledge the momentousness of the Civil War and the failures of Reconstruction. They both mention westward expansion, the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the World Wars, the Civil Rights Movement, the war in Vietnam, etc. To varying degrees, they touch on most of the major moments, the moments that tend to find themselves organized into pre-packaged units with tests at the end. However, neither Grandin nor Foner gives credence to the idea that their narratives are all-encompassing; in fact, they admit to the opposite.<sup>9</sup> As overworked, time-constrained teachers find each and every school year, it is impossible to fit every detail one might deem important into the typical American history survey, especially if there is no unifying theme other than chronology. There will always be tough choices concerning what to include. On that front, teachers can learn much from these Pulitzer Prize winning historians about how to weave a coherent, relevant and engaging narrative, free from the fear that they will “leave something out.” Rather than picking and choosing what is important based solely on chronology, teachers can identify an engaging concept to inform their narrative, much like freedom for Foner and the frontier for Grandin. A possible and particularly timely concept not explored by these historians is protest.

In the summer of 2020, the nation reeled after the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd with racially-driven protests sparking in major and unassuming cities alike. Black Lives Matter protestors called for responsibility on behalf of the police officers involved and sought reforms of policing tactics across the nation. In many places, protests became violent, including the use of tear gas and rubber bullets by law enforcement and the destruction of property and looting of businesses. Many of the nation’s news networks responded by delegitimizing the protests and chastising tactics, rather than focusing on the issues the protestors called attention to. A common sentiment included the idea that Americans of the past did not protest like *this*, we used to protest *the right way*. Another sentiment, viewing protest as un-American, also ran rampant. And yet, an understanding of protest throughout American history challenges the idea that past Americans were somehow more moral in their protest tactics or that protesting in this way is new or unseen in America’s past.

In 1773, colonists disguised as natives dumped hundreds of chests of tea into Boston Harbor in defiance of taxation imposed by the British empire. In doing so, they destroyed the property of the British East India Company. Defiance against the British empire culminated in the American Revolution, which, itself, can be described as a massive form of protest. After winning their independence, Americans protested, again, during Shays’ Rebellion. This time, it was the farmers who had fought in the Revolutionary War and received little compensation into the 1780s. After attempts to draft documents of grievances, the farmers took up arms, violently attacking courthouses. Soon, again, in the 1790s, Pennsylvanians protested against a new tax on whiskey. As before, violence came to define the Whiskey Rebellion.

The protest tradition continued into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, dominated by race and labor. In August of 1831, Nat

---

<sup>7</sup>Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company LTD, 1998), xv.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 170.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., xv.



Turner staged one of the largest slave rebellions in United States history, traveling from plantation to plantation, freeing the enslaved while killing enslavers. The rebellion represented one of the most feared possibilities of Southern society: that enslaved people would retaliate against the society that subjugated them through violence. In 1859, John Brown organized a similar abolitionist revolt in Harper's Ferry, Virginia, in an attempt to take over the federal arsenal. On the labor front, the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 saw rail workers organize a strike in opposition to wage cuts. The strike, and subsequent violence, halted the rails and the commerce associated while militiamen mobilized to stop the mayhem. Similarly, begrudged workers revolted violently against the Carnegie Steel Company during The Homestead Strike of 1892.

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century continued in a similar fashion with women protesting for the right to vote. Women picketing the White House in the 1910s lambasted President Wilson's refusal to support female suffrage, burning several of Wilson's speeches. These women were met with violent arrest and imprisonment (Alice Paul was famously force-fed raw eggs while attempting a hunger strike at the Occoquan Workhouse). The late 20<sup>th</sup> century saw even more reliance on protest. The long hot summer of 1967 included race riots. Latinx students walked out of their East L.A. classes in March of 1968 to protest a lack of bilingual support in the public school system. The 1969 Stonewall riot saw members of the LGBTQ+ community defy police harassment, which included barricading officers in the Stonewall Inn and lighting the building on fire. From 1969-1971 the protest group "Indians of All Tribes" occupied Alcatraz Island, claiming the land should be returned to the tribes that had once inhabited it. These historical examples barely scratch the surface of the protest movements employed by generations of Americans and showcase how protest, with its varying tactics, is an American tradition. In this light, the un-American rhetoric that accompanied the 2020 protests is mystifying.

The origin of the American protest tradition can be linked to the conception of the nation, in which not all people gained an equal claim to the founding ideals. The British tradition of liberty had already accepted exclusions. According to Foner, the exclusionary rhetoric of freedom was supplanted to the colonies: "...most eighteenth-century commentators assumed that only certain kinds of persons were fully capable of enjoying the benefits and exercising the rights of freedom. On both sides of the Atlantic...dependents lacked a will of their own and thus were incapable of participating in public affairs."<sup>10</sup> Foner explains that freedom in early America was tied to several things: the right to vote, economic resources, and political power.<sup>11</sup> Not only did people not endowed with these advantages not gain "freedom," but the nation bolstered itself on the antithesis of freedom: slavery. Race, gender, and economic status limited who was entitled to partake in American freedom. The nation, then, became even more exclusionary throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century by way of westward expansion, laws limiting immigration of certain "undesirable" groups, and the exploitation of wage workers. In each example, those denied equal access to freedom used protest as a tool. Only through protest have women, African Americans, laborers, and many others been able to partake in democracy. From this perspective, protest does not represent a hatred for one's nation but a yearning to be granted liberty and accepted as an American.

The concept of protest is not just an American tradition engrained by the inadequacies of our founding. It also has the type of fiery, controversial appeal that engages teenagers. Students could critically analyze each and every era of American history through the protest movements that occurred during that time, comparing motive and tactic, determining why and how so many Americans across so many generations have tapped into this tradition. Then, rather than ending their intellectual reckoning of the 2020 protests with the farcical rhetoric that Americans used to protest correctly, students could question why these protests occurred, how they relate to past protest movements, and whether or not they will inspire structural change. Students could even question why violence is oftentimes employed as a tactic, by both protestors and those in opposition. This form of critical exploration and inquiry cannot be achieved through the rote-memorization of historical facts. Narrativization, through the use of a through-line, presents history as a tool for critical analysis and does justice to the discipline

---

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 18-24.

by allowing students to engage with historical questions.

A counterargument to the use of a through-line in the secondary classroom might suggest that the teacher is fabricating a narrative by not following a traditional curriculum. To that suggestion, one can reference Hayden White's *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*: "How else can any past, which by definition comprises events, processes, structures and so forth, considered to be no longer perceivable, be represented in either consciousness or discourse except in an 'imaginary' way?"<sup>12</sup> Regardless of how we choose to reimagine the past, the past remains inaccessible. It is the discipline of history that attempts to recreate the past in terms that are currently accessible. Although there are facts deemed to be true, there is no correct narrative or way to organize those facts. Regardless of what American schools have presented as a correct narrative, historians constantly rewrite the stories of America's past using varying perspectives. As long as teachers base their narrativization on "what happened," as professional historians do, they can provide a litany of different American stories that relate to their students' experiences and embolden their critical inquiry of modern events.

---

<sup>12</sup> Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 57.

# CHARTING THE PRESENT OF TEACHING THE PAST: PROPAGANDA AND 1776 IN THE HISTORY CLASSROOM

Hunter Watts  
Normal Community High School  
Normal, Illinois

Teaching History 46(2)  
DOI: 10.33043/TH.46.2.45-48  
© 2021 Watts.  
Distributed with [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Published just twelve days after the attack on the United States Capitol in January 2021 and taken down just two days later on the day of President Biden's inauguration, the Trump Administration's *1776 Report* was a mere flash in the pan in the battle for America's history classrooms. Despite being just a flash, the report is indicative of larger trends in America's contemporary history and culture wars. Written as a response to *The New York Times'* *1619 Project*, works published by polarizing historians like Howard Zinn, and the perceived growth of critical race theory in classrooms, the goal of the *1776 Report* was to provide a renewal of "patriotic education" and a correction to the "radicalized view of American history."<sup>1</sup> The report lacks almost any evidence of historical thought and rigor, perhaps because not a single United States historian was consulted in its creation. There is a distinct difference between materials that contribute to quality history education and propaganda, the latter of which more properly describes the *1776 Report*.

While there are many frameworks that could be used to analyze the report's viability for history curriculum, Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke's "Five C's of Historical Thinking" is particularly well suited for the task.<sup>2</sup> Published in 2007 in the American Historical Association's magazine, *Perspectives on History*, Andrews and Burke's Five C's of Historical Thinking include context, causality, contingency, change over time, and complexity. These historians argue that the Five C's "stand at the heart of the questions historians seek to answer, the arguments we make, and the debates in which we engage."<sup>3</sup> Since its publication, the framework has been widely used as a tool to teach the myriad of complicated skills required for a proper study of history. The habits of mind articulated in the Five C's are fundamental to historical thinking, and therefore, reports or other secondary sources intended to be used as part of the history curriculum should be evaluated through the lens of the Five C's. Reports that do not hold up to the Five C's are ahistorical at best or propaganda at worst.

## Context

Perhaps the most obvious of the Five C's, context is a good starting point for scrutinizing secondary sources. It is vitally important that historians analyze past events and sources in the context of the times and situations in which they occurred or were created. The *1776 Report* is only forty pages long, half of which is a series of appendices attempting to reiterate universal American values. This leaves a measly twenty pages for outlining a story of the Founding, challenges to American principles, and charting a path for "National Renewal." Because of the small amount of space given to such a lengthy task, it could almost be excused to lack certain context, except the stated goal of the report is to, "enable a rising generation to understand the history and principles of the founding...." Conceivably, a goal as lofty as this cannot be completed in just twenty pages. The account of the Founding that the report offers is monolithic and leaves no room for the nuanced arguments that took place among the Founders as they created the system of government articulated by the Constitution.

In addition to a monolithic approach, random pictures of historical paintings and figures are inserted in the report without context or sometimes even relevance to what is written on the page. Quotes of various individuals are inserted just as randomly. In one baffling instance, a quote from Frederick Douglass is used to

---

<sup>1</sup>The President's Advisory 1776 Commission, "The 1776 Report," January 2021.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke, "What Does It Mean to Think Historically?" *Perspectives on History* 45, no. 1 (January 2007), <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2007/what-does-it-mean-to-think-historically>

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

show his supposed reverence and endorsement of the Founding principles.<sup>4</sup> The context of this quote, however, is important given that it is from Douglass's 1852 speech, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?"<sup>5</sup> The quoted excerpt is obviously cherry-picked, and the lack of context is either horribly ignorant or, worse, intentionally misleading. Later in the same speech, Douglass explained, "The rich inheritance of justice...is shared by you, not by me...The Fourth [of] July is yours, not mine." Douglass gave this scathing speech about the Fourth of July in 1852, but readers can be forgiven for not knowing Douglass' argument when the context of the quote is left out. The missing context is rampant in the report and the Douglass quote is merely one example. In paragraph after paragraph, quotes are selected without regard to their source, statements and claims are made without proper support, and grand conclusions are drawn without consideration given to the past. Given the distinct lack of context throughout the *1776 Report*, it remains more of a polemic argument as opposed to a useful historical source.

## Causality

Causality is the next of the Five C's. Historians often look to answer why and when particular events unfolded the way they did. Rather than attribute events to single causes, quality historical study aims to explain the past in terms of multiple causes. This is not the case in the *1776 Report*. Rather than attribute multiple causes to historical events, the report aligns the creation of the Constitution with a single cause—the existence of universal American values. For the writers of the report, the movement of history is simple; either people live up to American ideals or they do not. When people fail to live up to the ideals, social unrest takes place. Rather than offer a nuanced explanation of the founding in terms of a web of many forces coming together at various times, the report offers a teleological view of history, essentially claiming that because the principles of the Declaration are "universal and eternal," the creation of the United States was inevitable.

Throughout the entire document, events are detailed in terms of what happened, but rarely if ever, is the question of why things happened the way they did explored. This approach leaves an unsatisfying version of the American Founding. Because of the report's philosophical approach to the Founding, readers are left with a mass of unanswered questions. Why are the stated American principles considered to be natural? Why have Americans been divided on these American principles throughout the past? How is John Calhoun the founder of identity politics? For the writers of the report these answers are simple, and all have a single cause—because they are ideals the Founders built on, because some people did not live up to said ideals, and because Calhoun did not live up to the Founding principles.

## Contingency

To the historical thinker, contingency is about considering the fact that historical events were not destined to occur the way they did. In other words, historical events are contingent upon a series of previous events leading up to them. Contingency ensures that students of history do not walk away with a teleological view of events. The *1776 Report* plainly fails in this aspect of historical thinking. To understand that the report was written as a contemporary response to the heightened period of polarization, one need not look any further than the series of appendices at the end. The document's four appendices are perhaps the most enlightening. The first is the Declaration of Independence. The second is a series of comments on America's principles and Founders which reads more as religious activism than as a historical reflection. The third covers identity politics, including a reduction of John Calhoun as the founder of identity politics and a disingenuous analysis of critical race theory. The final appendix is an attack on current history education and a call for a restoration of patriotic history. If this document were to be of historical significance, nearly half of it would not be dedicated to addressing

---

<sup>4</sup>The President's Advisory 1776 Commission, "The 1776 Report," January 2021.

<sup>5</sup>Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" July 5, 1852, available at <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/what-to-the-slave-is-the-fourth-of-july/>



contemporary political discourse. In this way, the *1776 Report* is written from the present backwards. It is teleological in its analysis of history and fails to understand the contingency of historical events that brought about the present. Rather, it forces contemporary discourse upon the past, manipulating it for political gain.

## Change Over Time

Andrews and Burke claim that change over time is the easiest of the Five C's to grasp. This concept is about studying growth, decline, and continuity. Studying these trends offers grand insight into the interpreted course of historical events. Despite change over time being the easiest of the Five C's to grasp, the writers of the *1776 Report* write history as being stagnant. This approach is evident in the overwhelming commitment to national ideals that the report holds. Rather than portray the Founding as an evolution of events through the various perspectives of the different Founders, the writers of the report paint the Founding as a single-track monolithic event. Readers of the report could be excused for thinking that the creation of the Constitution was a clean process devoid of all conflict or vying interests. Further, the report suggests that change at all is threatening to the national ideals it describes. In a section on progressivism, the writers argue that changes in how citizens view the Constitution are dangerous to the foundation of the country. The idea that the Constitution might be a "living document" applicable to evolving times is pinned as heresy, despite it being the core argument of many of the Founders and arguably displaying far more impressive foresight. The Constitution is not a stagnant document. This is evident in the evolution of amendments and how courts have interpreted laws over time. The idea that the document is stagnant flies in the face of Thomas Jefferson's view of constitutional government, that the earth belongs to the usufruct of the living and that therefore the entire Constitution should be rewritten every generation. This disregard for Jefferson's perspective is ironic given the reverence for him displayed in earlier sections of the report. Rather than track this far more impressive change over time, the *1776 Report* paints a plain and stagnant picture of United States history, one where change is viewed as inherently backwards.

## Complexity

The last of the Five C's, and the one that the *1776 Report* perhaps falters with most, is complexity. History is messy. It is a complicated ongoing argument about the past that requires nuance to navigate properly. Yet the report suggests that history is simple and straightforward, and anyone who tries to argue otherwise violates American principles. The lack of complexity in the report is most evident in the discussion of challenges to America's principles. In this section, slavery, progressivism, communism, fascism, and identity politics are equivocated as threats to American democracy. Rather than confront the uniqueness of American chattel slavery or the irony of the Founders holding slaves, the *1776 Report* chalks slavery up as an unfortunate circumstance of the time with no lesson to be learned. Discussions of progressivism, fascism, and communism all lack complexity, and an in-depth analysis of any topic (for example, the influence of the Communist Party on labor and civil rights activism) is completely ignored. The section on identity politics is the most telling. In one paragraph, the report praises the Civil Rights Movement (and specifically Martin Luther King Jr., notably a progressive-socialist) for commitments to American ideals. In the next paragraph, the militancy and radicalization of the movement in the late 1960s is condemned, ignoring the complexity of why the movement trended in that direction. Even just a few sentences about the connections to Vietnam, connections to economic and class problems, or the failure of legislation to uphold American principles would shed a vastly different light on the report's telling of these seemingly simple events.

## Conclusion

In all, the *1776 Report* fails at all five pillars of this framework, leaving readers to determine whether the report is merely ahistorical, or whether it is misleading propaganda. Given the stated goals of the report and the myriad of misleading information found within its short telling of the United States' founding, the *1776 Report* is better described as propaganda. It is no wonder that historians have almost universally denounced the *1776*

*Report* as a legitimate piece of historical writing. Sam Wineburg charts out the act of historical thinking in his work, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past*.<sup>6</sup> In this work, Wineburg distinguishes what most people think of history—a body of stagnant facts—from how historians view history—as a method of knowing information in order to develop understanding. History is an ongoing argument about the past fueled by rigorous source examination and interpretation. Perhaps Michael Kazin put it best: “[T]he 1776 Report reveals profound ignorance about what professional historians of the United States actually think and do.”<sup>7</sup> It is clear that the writers of the *1776 Report* do not understand historical thinking.

Historical arguments are always reflective of the time in which they were written. In this case, the *1776 Report* was created during a period of heightened tension in the culture wars specifically focused on the teaching of history. Reducing the study of history down to pinpointing a single year is inherently reductionist. However, the selected year can illuminate the perspective of the writers. In this case, the selection of 1776 and the call for restoring patriotic education is a clear response to contemporary events. Students of history should learn to wrestle with the past in all its facets. Ignoring historical wrongs does little to improve society. It is natural for modern politics to influence school curriculum, just as it is natural for modern politics to influence the study of history. The danger in this influence, however, comes when it overshadows quality and a meaningful study of history. When history is manipulated to serve the politics of the day, it is no longer history. It becomes propaganda. The study of history is not inherently a patriotic act, nor should it be. Honest study of history helps societies to learn, grow, and develop into something more than the sum of their parts.

---

<sup>6</sup> Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Michael Kazin, “The 1776 Follies,” *New York Times*, Feb. 1, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/01/opinion/trump-1776-commission-report.html>

# SAVING AMERICAN HISTORY

Cameron Zindars

Mahomet-Seymour High School

Mahomet, Illinois

Teaching History 46(2)

DOI: 10.33043/TH.46.2.49-52

© 2021 Zindars.

Distributed with [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

There is a resurgence of national preoccupation over the content selection and methodology of what is taught to children in classrooms across America. Highly polarized citizens, politicians, and national media are in a war of words and hyperbolic rhetoric on the issue of how to teach the narrative of America. The classroom is often the battleground over the culture wars and is center stage of the infighting and identity politics in America. This emotionally charged issue is at the forefront of the American public as the pandemic and digital learning pried open the doors of classrooms, making educators' curriculum highly accessible. The additional controversy over critical race theory has increased the chaos and polarization of teacher content selection. What is often missed in the onslaught of public grandstanding over this issue is how this pressure affects the countless professional educators who are warily wading the waters of how they approach teaching history. History educators must bypass the societal pressures of how to teach American history and should instead help students critically analyze the nuances in America's narrative.

The debate over how American history should be taught has been raging for decades. In the early 20th century, the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) had a profound impact on the way the American narrative was taught. The UDC was able to overhaul countless southern history curricula by writing their own history textbooks to combat those of the North. Believing that Northerners were peddling a false narrative of the Civil War, the intent of the UDC was simple: To challenge the falsities of the North and to uphold the legacy of the Confederacy and the "Lost Cause." The UDC was able to interject a strong pro-Southern narrative in the writing of many history textbooks and American literature for many decades in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

Controversy over the presentation of the American narrative continued in the 1920s-1940s as Harold Rugg, a professor at Columbia University's Teachers College, created a series of social studies textbooks. Rugg had become convinced that *laissez-faire* economic policies, geared towards unrestrained capitalism, were detrimental to American society and its democratic foundation. This belief influenced Rugg's textbooks as he reimagined social studies and the role of children in their learning. The intent of his curriculum was to empower students to think critically about problems in American society, encouraging them to question societal structures and to propose alternatives. While early opposition to his textbooks existed, dire concerns over the textbooks being "un-American" and "communist" developed as organizations like the American Federation of Advertising and American Legion began a crusade against Rugg. By labeling Rugg and his textbooks "un-American" and associating them with communism, the opposition proved successful. A drastic decline in the sale of his textbooks occurred in just a four-year span, mangling the dispersion of Rugg's legitimate criticisms.<sup>2</sup>

Similar to Rugg, the National Center for History in the Schools attempted to rethink American history learning and curriculum in the early 1990's. They created national history standards that would rely heavily on historical thinking skills, as well as contemporary historiography and scholarship. This panel consisted of a wide range of educators and scholars and, through unified consensus, created standards that broadened the focus of American history. Opposition to these standards developed immediately, with critics claiming that the standards were replacing traditional American history with negative anti-American history. As a result of the backlash from politicians, media, and conservative historians, the standards failed to pass on a national level.<sup>3</sup>

In 2014, the College Board made substantial changes to their Advanced Placement United States History curriculum and cumulative exam, coincidentally similar to those of NCHS. Once again, conservatives argued

<sup>1</sup> Arica L. Coleman, "The Civil War Never Stopped Being Fought in America's Classrooms. Here's Why That Matters," Time, November 13, 2017, <https://time.com/5013943/john-kelly-civil-war-textbooks/>

<sup>2</sup> Charles Dorn, "'Treason in the Textbooks': Reinterpreting the Harold Rugg Textbook Controversy in the Context of Wartime Schooling," *Paedagogica Historica* 44, no. 4 (2008): 457-479.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

this revised curriculum portrayed American history from a cynical point of view and that it was preaching “identity politics.” Conservatives demanded the College Board replace what they believed to be an unpatriotic narrative of American history, with a more palatable and optimistic version. Backlash won out, and conservatives were able to curtail the College Board curriculum.<sup>4</sup>

Transition to the fall of 2019, and the debate over the narrative of America continued with the release of the polarizing *1619 Project*, published by the *New York Times*. The intent of this project was to provide a non-traditional argument that 1619, when the first enslaved people arrived in America, not 1776, and the signing of the Declaration of Independence, was the major starting point of American society. Nikole Hannah-Jones envisioned this project as a supplemental curriculum for teaching about slavery and its immediate and long-term impacts in American history. This project was perplexing to left leaning historians, as many appreciated the overall intent of the project, however, some questioned parts of the historical accuracies within the project. Princeton historian Sean Wilentz wrote a scathing letter in response to one of the central claims of the project, that the American Revolution was fought over the institution of slavery. In addition to Wilentz’s criticism, a group of well-respected conservative and liberal historians such as Gordon Wood, James McPherson, and James Oakes joined in opposition to the project. Their intent was to refute problems they saw within the project and to encourage remedies to improve some of its historical flaws.<sup>5</sup>

Other critics, however, were much more scathing in their condemnation of the *1619 Project*. Newt Gingrich referred to the project as a “lie.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, former President Trump referred to the project as “completely discredited,” and he insinuated it was revisionist history that overlooked America’s history of freedom.<sup>7</sup> Trump’s disdain for the project went further, stating:

Critical race theory, the 1619 project [sic], and the crusade against American history is toxic propaganda, ideological poison that if not removed will dissolve the civic bonds that tie us together. It will destroy our country. That is why I recently banned trainings in this prejudiced ideology from the federal government and banned it in the strongest manner possible.<sup>8</sup>

In January 2021, in direct opposition to critical race theory (CRT) and the *1619 Project*, Trump’s administration pandered to conservatives by releasing the *1776 Report*. This report addressed conservatives’ growing concern with the unpatriotic telling of American history from liberals. Instead of focusing on a more critical and nuanced view of America history, the report hoped to redeem the traditional telling of American exceptionalism and patriotism. The intent of the report was to promote an American history narrative that was “accurate, honest, unifying, inspiring, and ennobling.”<sup>9</sup>

Amid the outcry against Black Lives Matter protests, the *1619 Project*, and critical race theory, some politicians and state legislators have demanded these topics be banned from schools.<sup>10</sup> Obsessive concern over concepts like CRT have permeated the American public, as seen by Fox News’ mention of CRT over 1300 times in a span of four months. These preoccupations have found their way into school boards across America, as schools and states mandate bans against CRT. For example, over eight states have enacted legislation targeting CRT and

<sup>4</sup> Lindsey Layton, “Conservatives Convinced College Board to Rewrite American History,” *Washington Post*, June 30, 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/college-board-rewrites-american-history/2015/07/30/cadadd4c-36d1-11e5-b673-1df005a0fb28\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/college-board-rewrites-american-history/2015/07/30/cadadd4c-36d1-11e5-b673-1df005a0fb28_story.html)

<sup>5</sup> Adam Serwer, “The Fight Over the 1619 Project Is Not About the Facts,” *The Atlantic*, December 23, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/12/historians-clash-1619-project/604093/>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Brian Stelter and Oliver Darcy, “1619 Project Faces Renewed Criticism—This Time from within *The New York Times*,” CNN, October 12, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/10/12/media/new-york-times-1619-project-criticism/index.html>

<sup>8</sup> Juan Perez, Jr. and Nicole Gaudiano, “Trump Blasts 1619 Project as DeVos Praises Alternative Black History Curriculum,” *Politico*, September 17, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/09/17/devos-black-history-1776-unites-417186>

<sup>9</sup> The President’s Advisory 1776 Commission, “The 1776 Report,” 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Sarah Schwartz, “Lawmakers Push to Ban ‘1619 Project’ From Schools,” *Edweek*, February 3, 2021.



another twenty states have proposed legislation that would do something similar.<sup>11</sup> Republican Tom Cotton of Arkansas proposed legislation hyperbolically called the “Saving American History Act of 2020.” This bill proposed to defund any states that taught the indoctrinating “left-wing garbage” of the *1619 Project*.<sup>12</sup> Behind the scenes of the rhetoric, fear mongering, and debate over history curriculum are the teachers who inevitably feel pressure from both the left and the right to teach a particular way.

In 2021, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute released a nation-wide evaluation of individual state standards covering United States history and civics. The report stated the authors’ desire to be bipartisan, and that they believe state standards should not succumb to the “whitewashing” of history or “obsessive wokeness.” Further, in the introduction they acknowledged the deep-seated polarization of our country and that now more than ever, America needs high quality and robust state standards. The authors’ evaluation was based on how well a state’s standards clearly communicated specific information Americans should know, emphasized historical thinking skills, promoted civic engagement, and how well American history and civics are included in the K-12 curriculum. Overall, the evaluation found the majority of state standards were inadequate or mediocre in their quality. A common criticism of the inadequate state standards was that they were too broad, and that they omitted or minimized fundamental topics and or themes of American history and civics.<sup>13</sup> However, determining what facts, events, people, or topics are emphasized or omitted is often hotly contested and at the center of current culture wars.

Some argue history educators should only teach the facts, while remaining apolitical and neutral in the presentation of those facts. The irony of the expectation for educators to teach “objective facts” is that the selection and delivery of facts has proven to be highly disputed, even amongst well-respected historians. By analyzing different historians’ surveys of the narrative of American history, it is obvious how much variation there is in each of their stories. Howard Zinn, author of *A People’s History of the United States*, argues that from its birth, America has been dictated by the callous wealthy elite who deftly appease the middle class and ravage everyone else. Zinn presented an unfamiliar and messier history of America, a history of the infallible and heroic common people who challenged the oppression of the ruthless and cunning Establishment. For instance, Zinn dedicates an entire chapter to Native Americans and spends a great deal of time including their voice in his narrative of America.<sup>14</sup>

In comparison, Wilfred McClay’s, *Land of Hope*, endorsed by Trump’s *1776 Report*, attempts to provide an inspiring, hopeful, truthful, and compelling survey of the American narrative. In step with many American narratives, McClay continues to put a spotlight on commonly heard voices and perspectives of American history, but continuously neglects the voices of conflict and dissent. His book sheds light on the “good” of America and its leaders and suggests that most of American history, even the bad, was inevitable or even justifiable. For example, McClay brushes over the impact of Andrew Jackson’s Trail of Tears and the totality of westward expansion on Natives Americans, rarely dissecting the horrors they encountered such as the Battle at Little Bighorn, the Wounded Knee Massacre, and many more.<sup>15</sup>

The Fordham Institute, which released the nation-wide evaluation of individual state history standards, stated, “We understand and agree that there is more than one way to tell the American story, but if we refuse to compromise, that story may not be told at all.”<sup>16</sup> Both Zinn and McClay’s accounts of the American narrative fail

<sup>11</sup> Rashawn Ray and Alexandra Gibbons, “Why are States Banning Critical Race Theory,” Brookings, July 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2021/07/02/why-are-states-banning-critical-race-theory/>

<sup>12</sup> Saving American History Act of 2020, S. 4292, 116<sup>th</sup> Congress. (2020), <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/116/s4292/summary>

<sup>13</sup> Jeremy A. Stern, Alison E. Brody, José A. Gregory, Stephen Griffith, and Jonathan Pulvers, *The State of State Standards for Civics and U.S. History in 2021* (Washington D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2021) <https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/research/state-state-standards-civics-and-us-history-2021>

<sup>14</sup> Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Wilfred M. McClay, *Land of Hope: An Invitation to the Great American Story* (New York: Encounter Books, 2019).

<sup>16</sup> Stern, et al., *The State of Standards for Civics and U.S History in 2021*.

to show history for what it often is: complex and nuanced. Maybe the compromise is finding a middle ground between Howard Zinn's fatalistic leftist history and Wilfred McClay's conservative and naive grand narrative of American exceptionalism. Or maybe another approach might be looking at the American narrative through a particular perspective. For example, in her book *These Truths: A History of the United States*, Harvard historian Jill Lepore elected to analyze whether America has lived up to the nation's founding principles in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.<sup>17</sup>

Regardless of the longstanding historical pressures to teach American history a particular way, history educators would be wise to learn from Harold Rugg's vision for his students. The demand for educators to cultivate responsible citizens and lifelong learners will never be met by teaching uninspired facts of an undisputed history. As Rugg suggested, history educators should empower students to critically analyze the nuance of history and to ultimately formulate their own evaluations of the past. The true spirit of a democratic society is to educate its citizens in a way in which they can use their voice to better society. Making our classrooms student-centered and spending ample time having students analyzing content using historical thinking skills such as change and continuity, argumentation, contextualization, inquiry, and research will empower them. Furthermore, ensuring our formative and summative assessments heavily rely on these skills provides students with the opportunity to demonstrate their thinking.

It is also important to identify key themes in American history, and to make those themes the lynchpin of the course. Teaching in this way helps to narrow the focus of the class and, like Lepore's text, provides a through-line for students to connect with during the school year. Then, while teaching about these themes, we should ensure that students are provided multiple perspectives on the themes, especially through the use of primary sources. For example, in his book *The Story of American Freedom*, historian Eric Foner provides an analytical overview of American history through the lens of freedom. Foner goes to great lengths to argue that as some groups gain freedom, inevitably other groups are consequently denied freedom. For example, as the Constitution was being debated, the Framers protected the freedom of whites to own and enslave other people, thus stripping African Americans of their freedoms.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to using themes in American history, educators should choose to use powerful content that they are passionate about to help teach these themes. Students feed off of our energy as teachers, for better or for worse. The commonly encouraged apolitical, neutral, and apathetic educator crushes students' curiosity. Instead, as educators we should embrace both our own passions and our students' passions in order to cultivate a curiosity for learning. Oftentimes the best way to instill passion and curiosity is to choose topics of controversy and nuance and to permit students to research, discuss, and deliberate over them. Moreover, we must ensure that the content we teach is robust and that it includes an array of perspectives, and we must especially take time to provide a voice to the voiceless in traditional narratives of American history. We must know our students, meet students where they are, and identify their prior knowledge and skills. Sometimes that means the best thing for students is to encourage them to grapple with perspectives different than their own, or even those of society's prevailing view.

American history is messy, and the debate over how to teach it will likely continue. It is incredibly difficult to avoid being influenced by societal pressures of how to teach American history. However, it is imperative that history educators resist the pressures of society and instead uphold truly democratic principles in our classrooms. Educators should ensure our classrooms are founded on critical analysis and a nuanced telling of American history. This can be done by using central themes in American history as a through-line for students, while also allowing our passion and that of our students to cultivate a classroom culture of a curiosity for learning. Ultimately, our democracy is enhanced when we empower our students and help them hone the skills necessary to actively partake in critiquing and improving our country.

---

<sup>17</sup> Jill Lepore, *These Truths: A History of the United States* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018).

<sup>18</sup> Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 1998).

## Book Reviews

**Andrei Znamenski. *Socialism as a Secular Creed: A Modern Global History*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, an imprint of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2021. Pp. 451. \$135.00.**

Professor Andrei Znamenski of the University of Memphis is an expert on topics like the history of shamanism in Siberia and the wider role of religious practices in Russia and the Soviet Union. In *Socialism as a Secular Creed*, Znamenski provides a detailed explanation of the historical development of socialism, communism, Marxism, and related left-of-center ideological practices in a variety of national and historical contexts, both within nations and across international spaces. This sweeping and analytical global history of socialism and related ideological belief systems is timely given a recent rise of interest in the United States and globally in progressive and socialist policies, especially since the 2008 global financial crisis. Znamenski's main argument, as the title indicates, is that socialist and left-of-center ideologies have become and continue to be a replacement for religious practice for many people around the world. This is in part because socialism and related ideologies contain elements of religious practice, including quests for liberation from oppression and proselytizing, and by providing an all-absorbing belief system for followers. He argues that "the 'scientific' determinism of the Marxian teaching became a secularized form of the Judeo-Christian tradition customized for the age of modernity" (38). This is in part because numerous debates within the socialist tradition have led to splits between "true believers," "reformers," "fundamentalists," "adherents," and "blasphemers," all schisms which can be found in the history of world religions.

In many different national and historical contexts, communist or Marxist ideas were promoted with a zeal traditionally associated with religious practice. Znamenski notes that there were proselytizing tendencies in organizations such as the Communist International (Comintern), whose interest in fomenting revolutionary activity he analogizes with the Jesuit order in Catholicism. The comparisons between religious practice and ideological adherence are made many times in the book, including in a section on Eastern European Jews, many of whom embraced socialism as a form of identity, including in kibbutz settlements in Israel. In the Soviet Union, Marxism-Leninism served as a replacement for the influences of the Russian Orthodox Church and related denominations, with portraits of Vladimir Lenin and Josef Stalin serving as substitutes for religious icons. In the chapter on communist regimes in China, North Korea, and Cambodia, Znamenski notes how Communist Party leaders constructed their political activity around ingrained Confucian and/or Buddhist traditions, and how political leaders such as Mao Zedong, the Kim family, and Pol Pot utilized these existing frameworks of beliefs in order to promote ongoing revolution and state worship.

*Socialism as a Secular Creed* includes historical examples from a wide global spectrum of socialist experiments in nations such as Germany, Russia, Sweden, Israel, China, North Korea, Cambodia, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and others. Each of the sections on national histories include discussions on the historical and political context of leftist politics, important individuals, and the cultural context which made socialism appealing or acceptable. There is notably little to no treatment of Latin American examples, though, and the majority of the discussion in the book centers around Western examples and scholars, with one chapter each devoted to Asian and African examples.

The time frame of the study is very broad, with sections on the early utopian socialist experiments which predated Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels on one end of the temporal spectrum and discussions which touch on how the global left today operate on the other end, including ample references to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Bernie Sanders, Jeremy Corbin, and others. Znamenski also investigates the causes behind the rise of the New Left and the recent transition in academia towards political correctness and "wokeness," which he sees as an extension of the earlier work of the Frankfurt School and British Cultural Studies.

Znamenski's intense understanding of the complexity of the topic is evident throughout, as well as his general aversion to leftist ideas (Znamenski was originally from the Soviet Union and immigrated to America in the 1990s), though he stops short of turning the book into a complete refutation of socialist ideas. However,

his preference for the ideas of Ludwig von Mises and of Friedrich von Hayek, twentieth-century scholars who worked to refute socialist ideas, is evident. Those looking for a completely “balanced” approach to the history of socialism might look elsewhere, though admittedly most other studies of this topic tend to sway left in their interpretation, so Znamenski’s approach is unique in that respect.

This volume is a remarkable resource on the history of socialism and is unequaled in its encyclopedic compendium of this information. It is intellectually engaging and spares no efforts in bringing complexity to the topic. It will be useful for university instructors who wish to prepare an advanced undergraduate course around the history of socialism. In a modern world history survey course, instructors might use the many historical illustrations to prepare teaching activities around an exploration of the history of socialism in particular nations. This approach would best be done by supplementing one of Znamenski’s chapters with some historical primary sources related to that time and place. It might be especially successful for instructors to consider using comparative examples from the book alongside each other to illustrate how socialism was implemented and practiced differently in different cultural and historical contexts. This book might also be useful to assign to graduate students in seminars on modern world history or the history of socialism.

Kansai Gaidai University

Scott C.M. Bailey

**David Eaton. *World History Through Case Studies: Historical Skills in Practice*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. Pp. 283. \$20.96.**

Anxiety about just what content to feature and how to approach it often poses an almost paralyzing occupational hazard for anyone who teaches a world history course. Not only does the vast quantity of possible details to select about who did what, where, and when render a coverage model unfeasible, but the historiographical disposition of world history eschews traditional units of analysis that facilitate linear narratives neatly delineating what matters as history and who makes it. David Eaton proposes a path around this version of the “mile wide but an inch thick” dilemma by framing the world history course as an exercise in emphasizing habits of historical thinking through deeper critical analysis of specific situations, or “case studies.” The phrase “habits of historical thinking” seems a better fit for the subtitle than “historical skills in practice,” which implies guiding students in direct engagement with historical evidence, such as primary sources. Eaton’s approach—as clarified in his compelling introduction—engages the complexities of interpretation, argumentation, and narrative construction. The twenty case studies that form the main body of the book span a chronology that stretches from the Paleolithic era to the present millennium and encompass the global diversity of human societies from tribal communities to empires and modern states scattered across the map. Each reader will likely find some of these case studies ready-made for presenting to students, others that might be reframed to fit their own classroom needs, and yet others better set aside. When used flexibly this way, Eaton’s book offers a model for considering how to restructure the world history course and as a catalyst for individual instructors to develop case studies that reflect their own interests and expertise.

Each chapter aligns with one of five concepts that “illuminate specific procedural knowledge of the discipline of history” (2): historical significance, historical empathy, evidence, continuity and change, and progress and decline. The following inventory summarizes the case studies presented in each chapter as they align with each of these concepts:

- historical significance—Chapter 3 (“Ancient Egypt Matters”) scrutinizes the controversy elicited by Martin Bernal’s *Black Athena*; Chapter 5 (“Whose Key to China?”) assesses Confucianism as a lens for understanding Chinese culture and society; Chapter 12 (“Orunmila Saves”) examines the persistence of marginal religious beliefs and practices absorbed into Caribbean Christianity; and Chapter 17 (“Shadows of the Past”) analyzes transformations in the *wayang* tradition of puppet theater in Indonesia as a way to make sense of colonialism.



- historical empathy: Chapter 7 (“Bread and Circuses”) contemplates the culture of gladiatorial games across the ancient Roman world; Chapter 9 (“Going Berserk”) considers how the image of the Vikings has been manipulated; Chapter 13 (“Heavy Metals”) enters the silver mine of Potosí in colonial Bolivia exploited through the *mita* system of labor; and Chapter 15 (“Germ Warfare”) assesses the impact of disease in shaping events in the revolutionary Atlantic.
- evidence: Chapter 2 (“Horsing Around”) discusses the archaeological, genetic, and linguistic evidence to trace the evolution of the domestication of the horse in the ancient past; Chapter 6 (“Making Waves”) does the same for the Bantu migrations across Africa; Chapter 11 (“Supreme Sacrifice”) surveys the variety of evidence informing interpretations of the Mexica practice of human sacrifice; Chapter 18 (“Open Wounds”) evaluates the treatment of evidence as Poles confront the legacy of the Holocaust; and Chapter 19 (“Poor Numbers”) analyzes the role that statistical data, especially GDP, has played in shaping perspectives about the developed and the developing world.
- continuity and change: Chapter 4 (“Stretching the Past”) traces the transformations that yoga underwent as an Indian tradition introduced to the West during the late nineteenth century; Chapter 14 (“We’ll Always Have Paris”) deconstructs the City of Light as an icon of modernity; and Chapter 16 (“Tokyo Drift”) analyzes the modernization reforms pursued by Japan’s Meiji Restoration.
- progress and decline: Chapter 8 (“Veiled Meanings”) interrogates the “progressive narrative” around veiling as a practice in Islamic culture; Chapter 10 (“This Island Earth”) evaluates explanations about the “collapse” that Rapa Nui (Easter Island) purportedly experienced by the time Europeans arrived there during the seventeenth century; and Chapter 19 (“Global Goals”) examines debates about globalization as “a force for good or a problem to be solved” (220) through the example of African soccer.

Eaton’s first chapter (“Urge Overkill”) demonstrates how a single case study can integrate two or more of the five concepts through analyzing the dispute over Kennewick Man, known by Native Americans of the northwestern United States as the Ancient One. The remains of this inhabitant of the region some 9000 years ago were discovered near Kennewick, WA in 1996, quickly claimed by local archaeologists, and then became the focus of a decades-long legal battle as local Native American groups invoked the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act in an effort to recover the Ancient One for reburial. Eaton presents this discovery and the ensuing controversy as an example of how historians analyze and interpret evidence and how different groups understood the discovery’s historical significance (14). Instructors might also explore the opportunities that this case study offers students to engage in historical empathy by adopting the perspective of a marginalized group long prevented from exercising control over its history and cultural artifacts—or, for that matter, from the perspective of researchers who worried that reburying the remains would end any possibility that new and improved technologies developed in the future could yield answers impossible to answer in the present. This furthermore suggests how culture mediates the way people understand and relate to the past, complicating what “history” means. Eaton does not explore all these angles explicitly in the chapter, but they can be brought to the surface either by design or during discussion, suggesting the latent possibilities embedded in any of the case studies.

Eaton judiciously limits the focus of each chapter to one or, at most, two of the concepts to illustrate the approach he proposes, since attempting to juggle several that could frame any one of the case studies would prove more cumbersome than informative. All the chapters address questions of evidence in some way, and most connect the case studies to mentalities, assumptions, and perspectives that prevailed at various points during the near or more distant past and conditioned interpretations of that evidence. In that latter sense, “continuity and change” is another of the five concepts consistently threaded throughout the book, if most often only implicitly. While Eaton presents Chapter 5 (“Whose Key to China?”) as an exercise in investigating “the significance of Confucius to Chinese culture, and why it might be overstated” (59), the reader gets as much or even more a sense of the continuities and changes that have affected the legacy of Confucianism across the

centuries in China—not to mention the continuities and changes discernible when thinking about China's past generally. Still, Eaton might be more direct and explicit at times about how other concepts might fit with certain case studies. As a case in point, one might understand why Eaton chose to engage the legacy of the Holocaust in Chapter 18 (“Open Wounds”) to explore “how evidence can be manipulated to support a particular agenda, and how perceptions of the reliability of available evidence shape how historians construct the past” (205). But, given the dangers posed by denial, one would also like to know how he might have modeled that tragedy to emphasize historical empathy.

A few chapters seem arguably to be more suited for a western civilization rather than a world history course. This is especially so for Chapter 14 (“We’ll Always Have Paris”) and perhaps less so for Chapters 7 (“Bread and Circuses”) and 15 (“Germ Warfare”), all of which feature locations, people, and events typical of the traditional western civilization approach. Those chapters may be read otherwise, though, since world history has enough flexibility to accommodate narratives situated in the local and specific as it does include narratives highlighting encounters, interactions, and exchanges that traverse geographical and cultural boundaries. Such flashbacks to an older framework that posed fewer (albeit still many) problems than the world history survey course of sorting out what content to include and what to pass by were fleeting, though, and Eaton consistently speaks to the world history instructor that many of us have become rather than the western civilization instructor some of us used to be.

In any case, instructors in survey courses of any configuration—world history, western civilization, or U.S. History—will find this book a valued resource for reflection and planning, since cultivating habits of historical thinking is a common goal shared across the history curriculum. Given that, the case studies might have been enhanced with suggestions for teaching strategies to complement the lists of further readings provided at the end of each chapter (and in the endnotes that follow the final chapter.) Bloomsbury Academic may want to consider developing a companion volume that does just that.

Gwynedd Mercy University

Michael Clinton

**Eric D. Weitz. *A World Divided: The Global Struggle for Human Rights in the Age of Nation-States*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019. Pp. 550. \$35.00.**

In *A World Divided*, historian Eric Weitz is concerned with the crooked path toward the development of human rights from the nineteenth century to the present. This is a wide-ranging narrative filled with fascinating anecdotes and demonstrates the author's exceptional knowledge of global history. Unlike several recent histories that suggest the waning of human rights in the period under review, Weitz carefully selected nine case studies from Greece and Armenia to Namibia and Burundi to demonstrate how perceptions of human rights continue to develop. Each of the chapters is framed around several big questions: What are human rights? Who possessed human rights? How were human rights violated? Ultimately, he finds that broad human rights were widely proclaimed in newly created nation-states yet, at the same time, were denied to those deemed “the other.”

Weitz begins this history at a moment in the late eighteenth century when empires such as the Ottoman, Persian, and Chinese were starting to crack—ever so slightly—and the allure of belonging to a nation started to take hold. He describes in rich detail the strict hierarchical structures within empires that kept people subservient and without rights, including required acts of prostration and slavery. He recounts the writings of scholars and world travelers such as Rigas Velestinlis, William James, and Isabella Bird who encountered diverse people and ideas and played a role in disseminating ideas about rights in public spaces; and he weaves together many early struggles for human rights that played out across the globe. Several of these histories will be familiar to readers, while others, as Weitz acknowledges, “unfold in out-of-the-way geographies” (6).

A significant contribution of this book is that Weitz identifies several powerful themes across space and time that help readers understand the development of human rights. The first is that every successful human rights achievement came from grassroots resistance that gained international support. In February 1821, wealthy

Greek merchants and *klephts* (clan-based brigands) revolted against Ottoman rule. Their goal of carving out a national state initially failed, but over the decade, British Philhellenes (romantic advocates of Greek civilization and independence) and the so-called Great Powers intervened following the Balkan Wars and established a quasi-sovereign Greek state at the Vienna Congress. The success of Greece would serve as an international “touchstone.” Slaves in the Bahia region of Brazil revolted against their oppressive and horrendous conditions to achieve recognition as human beings. In Namibia, the Nama people went to war against German colonists as did the Sioux in Minnesota. In both cases, the “color line” marked them as inferior, and property was confiscated to make way for “civilization.” Zionists such as David Ben-Gurion built on decades of Jewish lobbying going back to the 1878 Berlin Congress and guilt over the Holocaust and successfully persuaded the United Nations to declare Israel as a Jewish state on May 14, 1948. In each of these cases, Weitz convincingly demonstrates that the conception of a state based on a majority population, “almost inevitably identifies others as dangerous minorities” (358), a second theme in the book.

Minority populations in newly recognized nation-states were subjected to discriminatory laws such as population exchanges and “population unmixing.” The Turkish government was first to forcefully remove Greeks and Armenians and the practice became standard following the Lausanne Conference. Weitz details the wrenching impact of these policies on the Sioux, Palestinians, and targeted groups within the Soviet Union such as Poles, Estonians, and Finns. In the case of Armenians in Turkey and Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda and Burundi, the most extreme expression of population unmixing led to genocide.

The final, and perhaps most interesting, theme is the appropriation of human rights language to consolidate political control. In both the Soviet Union and North Korea, communist leaders spoke to the concerns, interests, and aspirations of many when they promised human rights. Readers might be surprised that the Soviet Union became “a driving force behind so many of the postwar U.N. human rights resolutions,” though in both instances, leaders such as Leonid Brezhnev, Park Chung-hee, and Kim Il-sung simultaneously harassed, violently repressed, and deported individuals and national groups (295). Despite these tragedies, though, Weitz concludes the book on a positive note. He draws on the work of Nelson Mandela, Ralph Bunche, and Bertha Lutz (among others) to explain how advancements in political and civil rights at the level of the nation state moved to the international level in the late twentieth century. The tireless efforts of activists, the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the legal decisions within the International Criminal Court put the conversation over human rights on center stage, which is exactly where Weitz suggests it belongs.

The material in *A World Divided* is more than suitable for use in advanced high school world history classrooms and with undergraduates, but they would surely protest the size of the book. Nevertheless, this book is eminently teachable and should be used. Each chapter stands on its own and could be assigned to students as a case study. Additionally, the book serves as a model for historical synthesis of lesser-known events related to the struggle for human rights, and the three big questions Weitz asks certainly provide the foundation for fruitful discussion with students.

College of Western Idaho

Benjamin Harris

**Ellen M. Snyder-Grenier. *The House on Henry Street: The Enduring Life of a Lower East Side Settlement*. New York: Washington Mews Books, 2020. Pp. 247. \$27.95.**

When the typical student reflects on the settlement house movement, they probably envision the mostly Progressive Era project aimed to uplift and “Americanize” new immigrants who settled in growing urban centers in large numbers in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Curator and author Ellen Snyder-Grenier disrupts this perception by tracing the story of Henry Street Settlement, a settlement in the Lower East Side neighborhood of New York City, from its founding in 1893 to the present. She also highlights the way Henry Street strived to create relationships across class, race, and ethnicity. This book was conceived as part of a project to celebrate the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the settlement.

In clearly written prose grounded in primary source research, Snyder-Grenier argues that the Henry Street Settlement has survived across time because of its “adaptability,” its core mission to bring “diverse people together,” and the fact that the issues the founders created the institution to address remain salient across the decades (3). She argues the history of the settlement sheds light on the larger histories of the Lower East Side, New York, and the nation. In this vein, the book addresses a wide variety of themes, including poverty, education, health care, immigration, gender, multiculturalism, and the professionalization of social work and nursing.

The book is divided into three chronological sections. The first discusses the founding of the settlement until the start of the 1930s. Appalled by the conditions on New York’s Lower East Side, Lillian Wald, a child of Jewish immigrants, a nurse, and the settlement’s founder, moved to the neighborhood to provide medical care for the mostly Southern and Eastern European immigrant population. Inspired by existing settlement houses like London’s Toynbee Hall, Wald believed living among those she served would help her best address the needs of the community. She raised funds to hire more nurses, and her venture quickly expanded to confront other issues, such as child labor and education.

Part Two examines the changes that came to the settlement between the Great Depression of the 1930s and the start of Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty in the mid-1960s. During this period the population of the neighborhood Henry Street served changed significantly. The types of funding the settlement depended on also changed, with more support now coming from the federal government.

Finally, Part Three continues from the late 1960s until the present as the settlement faced new challenges due to leadership changes, funding shortfalls, and changing circumstances in the neighborhood, including rising crime, homelessness, drug use, and the emergence of the AIDS crisis. As Snyder-Grenier puts it, the settlement “has had to adapt to shifting demographics, changing ways of funding, a fluctuating political environment, and the extensive demolition and rebuilding of surrounding housing” and yet it continued changing with the times in order to carry on with its mission of serving neighborhood residents (190).

The book appropriately includes the voices of the people the settlement served and effectively places the settlement within the changing context of the times. But overall, this is a work that is more interested in celebrating Henry Street than offering a critique of the institution or the settlement house movement generally. To highlight the uniqueness of Henry Street’s offerings, such as its focus on the arts, the book could have done more to place Henry Street into conversation with other contemporary settlement houses.

With its long chronological reach and ability to tie Henry Street to broader themes of the day, sections of the book could be integrated into an upper-division undergraduate course. In terms of lesson creation, Henry Street offers an interesting case study for incorporation into lectures or class activities. Readers interested in the history of the settlement house movement or the history of social work will find the book informative.

Overall, the book highlights how popular ideas regarding the roots of poverty swing with the times, from individuals being perceived as the drivers of their own fate to social conditions bearing more of the blame for inequity. Did Henry Street impact the lives of individuals in a positive way? Absolutely. Over time, has it changed the national conversation about poverty? While Henry Street initiatives have inspired federal programs, frustratingly, the challenges Wald founded Henry Street to address, such as poverty and disparity in accessibility to health care, are still with us today.

Georgia State University

Eliza Martin

**Louis Menand. *The Free World: Art and Thought in the Cold War*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021. Pp. 857. \$35.00.**

Among his many talents as a scholar and writer, Louis Menand has a remarkable ability to make complex ideas comprehensible without oversimplification. His Pulitzer-prize winning 2001 book, *The Metaphysical Club*, did so with late nineteenth-century American philosophy. *The Free World* does so with intellectual and artistic creativity in the Cold War, from the end of World War II through the Vietnam War.



This period of time saw a flourishing of cultural production, of art, thought, music, cinema, and literature, sustained by a burgeoning culture-industry comprised of publishers, magazines, institutes, museums, and galleries, and consumed by an increasingly educated public. Menand is interested in how the Cold War itself propelled this extraordinary cultural output. The Cold War “raised the stakes” and “charged the atmosphere” (6), as artists and thinkers grappled with the meaning of democracy, equality, and individualism in a consumer capitalist society. In sum, culture became the arena in which liberal idealism was represented – and contested. The thread running through the book, connecting its diverse subjects, from George Kennan to Hannah Arendt to James Baldwin to Andy Warhol, is freedom. What is it and how do we find it? Freedom was, Menand writes, “the slogan of the times” (xiv); totalitarianism, in all its forms, the anti-slogan.

With its fixation on freedom, the United States came to replace European capitals, namely Paris, as the center of artistic and intellectual life. The U.S. was imagined as a beacon of freedom in Cold War political life, and, signifying another kind of freedom, as a place where intellectual boundaries could be pushed and the avant-garde could thrive. A series of Supreme Court rulings in the 1950s and 1960s also liberated art, for the first time, from state censorship. Yet, though centered on the U.S., *The Free World* is a transatlantic study, featuring the stories of European exiles such as Arendt and Claude Levi-Strauss and of non-Americans like George Orwell, Jean Paul Sartre, and Jacques Derrida. Menand is interested in how these thinkers’ ideas germinated in the context of American Cold War ideology, and, in turn, their reception in the U.S. As an intellectual historian, Menand depicts the social forces that sparked new ideas or new forms of art or music, and he uncovers the various relationships, collaborations, and even chance-meetings that influenced them. Many of these stories are familiar – Menand largely draws from other scholars – but they are so well told, and often juxtaposed together in unexpected ways, that they read as fresh. He has a gift for finding the right idiosyncratic biographical detail, the humorous aside, the odd twist of fate. And, he explains weighty concepts like existentialism, structuralism, and post-structuralism, with illuminating precision. Despite the book’s length, one wants to read every word.

The best chapters cohere around a particular person or a particular set of ideas and tap explicitly into the theme of freedom. Other chapters are more fragmented and strained, grouping together strange bedfellows, such the chapter on feminism that begins with Betty Friedan and ends with Susan Sontag and the underground New York art scene. It all works, though, because Menand is voracious in his excitement about ideas and art, both high and low. He treats figures as diverse as Isaiah Berlin and Tom Hayden, or Elvis Presley and John Cage, with equal seriousness, and it is often hard to discern where he stands. That said, his predilections do seep out, such as when he defends the Beats or Derrida against their harshest critics or when he expresses impatience for Sontag’s humorlessness.

Menand is particularly adept at tracing connections between U.S. foreign policy and intellectual output. *The Free World* begins with Kennan, whose realist, anti-ideological vision clashed with the idealist doctrine of liberal expansion, and it ends with the Students for a Democratic Society and other dissenters of Cold War doctrine, including the National Student Association, which, in a dark irony, was funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The takeaway is that, in the Cold War context, even dissent served the state. The hegemony of liberal idealism was inescapable, since to fight it was to demonstrate the freedom it offered.

It is fitting that Menand has written a book about freedom in the Cold War in such intelligible, vivid prose. Orwell, after all, “made jargon, formula, elision, obfuscation, and cliché the enemies of liberty and democracy and the symptoms of creeping totalitarianism” (50). The book’s clarity is its greatest benefit to teachers. It provides deep context for teaching the Cold War and for introducing art, literature, and philosophy into the history classroom. Some of the chapters could be excerpted and assigned. What’s more, it provides a model for how to translate complicated ideas into everyday language – something sorely lacking in much contemporary academic discourse.

## **Teaching History: A Journal of Methods**

**Founded in 1975**

**First Issue Published in 1976**

### **Founders:**

Stephen Kneeshaw, College of the Ozarks

Loren Pennington, Emporia State University

Philip Reed Rulon, Northern Arizona University

### **Editor:**

Stephen Kneeshaw, College of the Ozarks (1976-2016)

Sarah Drake Brown, National Council for History Education (2016-present)

### **Book Review Editors:**

Ronald Butchart, SUNY College at Cortland (1976-1981)

William Mugleston, Georgia Highlands College (1981-1991  
and 1993-2004)

Bullitt Lowry, University of North Texas (1992-1993)

Robert Page, Georgia Highlands College (2005-2013)

C. David Dalton, College of the Ozarks (2014-2015)

Richard Hughes, Illinois State University (2016-present)

### **Publication Directors:**

Loren Pennington, Emporia State University (1976-1980)

Samuel Dicks, Emporia State University (1981-2002)

Christopher Lovett, Emporia State University (2002-2020)