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TEACHING THE COMPLEXITY OF SLAVERY

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The history of slavery in the antebellum South is a challenging topic to teach on a variety of levels. It is a complex subject with a rich historiography that informs issues of race in contemporary America. Students walking into the American history survey, however, tend to have simplistic understandings of American slavery, understandings that they do not shed easily. Instructors of the U.S. history survey, meanwhile, attentive to "coverage" issues, struggle to adequately address the complexity of slavery in a few class sessions.¹

Historians have discussed the views students have about slavery for some time. In the 1990s Ellen Swartz and Peter Kolchin complained about how slavery was presented in American history textbooks. Textbooks, they found, neither revealed that slavery is a complicated subject constantly being reinterpreted nor addressed important "underlying issues" of slavery. More recently, Russell Olwell stressed that students too often understand slavery in very basic terms, as a "unified, static, unchanging institution." Similarly, Tracey Weis found that students tend to have crude "Gone With the Wind" views of slavery. Ira Berlin maintains that "stereotypes ... fixed the history of slavery." These stereotypes prevent students from gaining a thorough understanding of slavery because they see slavery only in terms of narratives about the Civil War and lack a sense of "historical agency."² What all these scholars have shown is that students tend to conceptualize slavery in narrow one-dimensional terms instead of understanding that slavery has a history that cannot be reduced to simplistic characteristics.³

¹This article was originally presented at the International Conference on Teaching and Learning, Niagara University, Niagara, NY, January 11-12, 2007.

²Ellen Swartz, "Emancipatory Narratives: Rewriting the Master Script in the School Curriculum," *Journal of Negro Education*, 3 (1992), 343; Peter Kolchin, "Slavery in the United States Survey Textbooks," *Journal of American History*, 84 (1998), 1436-1437; Russell Olwell, "New Views of Slavery: Using Recent Historical Work to Promote Critical Thinking about the 'Peculiar Institution,'" *History Teacher*, 34 (August 2001), 459; Tracey Weis, "What's the Problem? Connecting Scholarship, Interpretation, and Evidence in Telling Stories about Race and Slavery," *The Journal of American History*, 92 (March 2006), 1386; Ira Berlin, "American Slavery and Memory and the Search for Social Justice," *The Journal of American History*, 90 (March 2004), 1262.

³A key lesson from the scholarship of teaching is that the views students have coming into class must be addressed. The unsophisticated understandings students have about slavery is not unique to this topic. Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke have pointed out that in U.S. history courses students often fail to see the "complexity" of history in general, and their knowledge of history seems to consist of "a cast of heroes and villains to cheer and boo." Ken Bain explains that one of the greatest difficulties college

(continued...)

In my experience, American slavery is a subject in which students' preconceived assumptions severely limit their understanding of slavery. Students view slave-owners as evil, and they view slaves as passive victims. And they want to view them in these dualistic terms. For many students, the story of slavery is a moral story, not a historical one, in which there are "good guys" and "bad guys." The moral indictment students have about the institution of slavery, while valuable in the development of their ethical awareness, places them in a struggle with an instructor who wants them to view this subject in historical terms. That is not to say, however, that historians avoid making moral judgments. Of course, historians share the repulsion students have about slavery, but historians attempt to dig deeper to understand how slavery operated.

Many historians see history as a powerful tool in the development of moral values. Jörn Rüsen, for example, argues that a critical historical consciousness, by encouraging a critique of past moral values, can make a positive contribution to students' own moral values. To have the ability to offer an effective critique, though, students must have a firm understanding of the historical context in which those values existed. Roger I. Simon also believes history can shape students' values but in a different way. When teaching about past suffering, he recommends that teachers focus on creating a response in students that "impels" them to think reflectively about their own ethics and how they live in relation to others, to rethink their own identity and view of the world.⁴

The development of moral values through historical understanding, as discussed by Rüsen and Simon, looks very different from the basic dualistic moral view of slavery students have in hand as their image of slavery in the antebellum South. Students often believe they "know" slavery because they understand slavery was

³(...continued)

instructors in all fields face is that students are very resistant to having their "mental models" challenged, no matter how inaccurate those models may be. For example, Ibrahim Abou Halloun and David Hestenes, two physicists at Arizona State University, in their study of how students understood the basic laws of motion, found that students tend to follow a more "intuitive framework" that is Aristotelian and reject Newtonian principles—even after learning about Newton's laws and conducting experiments that prove his laws! Encouraging students to shed their own inaccurate models in order to fully understand a given subject is thus one of the greatest challenges instructors face. The "assumptions and beliefs" students bring into the classroom, Robert Bain's research has also shown, can "undermine" even the best efforts by teachers. See Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke, "What Does It Mean to Think Historically?," *Perspectives*, 45 (January 2007), 35; Ken Bain, *What the Best College Teachers Do* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 22-28; Robert B. Bain, "Into the Breach: Using Research and Theory to Shape History Instruction," in *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, Peter N. Stearns, Peter Seixas, and Sam Wineburg, eds. (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 334.

⁴Jörn Rüsen, "Historical Consciousness: Narrative Structure, Moral Function, and Ontogenetic Development," in *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, Peter Seixas, ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 75-76; Roger I. Simon, "The Pedagogical Insistence of Public Memory," in *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, 186-187.

wrong. Masters were evil people. What else is there to learn? They see little value in understanding slavery in any elaborate historical terms. Such a position can lead them to resist some key notions contemporary historians of American slavery use as their premise: that slavery varied greatly over place and time, that slavery was a complex social system, and that the history of slavery in America is debated by historians.

Slavery is a story of victims and abusers. But other important stories also emerge: stories of slave-owners, who had positive self-images of themselves and their behavior, and stories of slaves, who refused to be dehumanized and created a life for themselves within the abject system of slavery. Historians today present different understandings of slavery. They debate a whole host of issues and generally offer a complicated story about slavery. As Ira Berlin has written, historical scholarship about American slavery presents "a history in which slavery was made and remade by men and women on their own terms, if rarely to their own liking."⁵

When teaching slavery in U.S. history survey courses, I have struggled with how to promote a sophisticated historical conception of slavery, to achieve my primary objective: I want students to understand that slavery in the antebellum South was a complex social system. After much reflection, I developed a three-pronged method. The first step is to focus on a key concept to give meaning to the learning process. The second is to relate this concept to students' own lives, so that they can apply the concept personally. The third is to design an assignment that asks students to construct their own understanding of the subject based on primary sources.

In designing my approach to teaching the subject of slavery, I asked myself a series of questions in an effort to discover an effective method for teaching slavery. I went through this process to be self-reflective about my own teaching, with particular attention to my objectives and the methods I use to achieve those objectives.

The first question I asked myself was: **How can I better enable students to understand that slavery was a complex social system?**

I approached the answer to that question by looking at Ken Bain's study of successful college instructors. He found that the most effective college teachers seek to "transform" students' "conceptual understanding" of a given topic by providing them with new frameworks. That is, successful teachers "challenge" the ideas students already hold on a given issue and present new models for understanding it.⁶ I applied this suggestion by thinking about how to offer an historical perspective on slave-owners, one that would encourage students to move beyond the simple characterization of slave-owners as evil. I also looked for a unifying concept that might reveal that slavery was a complex social system while also providing students with a new meaning of slavery in terms they could understand. To help students fully grasp the complicated

⁵Berlin, "American Slavery and Memory and the Search for Social Justice," 1262.

⁶Ken Bain, *What the Best College Teachers Do*, 46-51, 110-112.

relationship between masters and slaves, I arrived at the concept of “paternalism” based on Eugene Genovese’s classic work on American slavery, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*.⁷

In contrast to previous historians of American slavery, Genovese argued that slaves were not passive victims. Rather, he maintained that they asserted their humanity within what he defined as a “paternalistic” system in which they accepted white domination while demanding a degree of autonomy. In this portrayal, slaveholders saw themselves as being paternalistic, and thus in very positive terms. In their minds, they were taking care of blacks. Slaveholders even referred to slaves as family members. Genovese thus uses familiar terms to describe the master-slave relationship because that is how slave-owners viewed it—slaveholders managed their slaves as if slaves were included within a patriarchal system. This, Genovese shows, demonstrates the contradiction of slavery: Masters viewed slaves as both property and as human beings. Slaves, according to Genovese, accepted this system of paternalism because they understood how they could use it to their advantage: They could demand some rights and manipulate the system.⁸

A danger in using the concept of paternalism as the centerpiece of a class session on slavery is that students might come away believing that slaves were actually treated well. Certainly that is not my goal. Rather, I want to show the dualism of slavery, that slaves were treated as both objects and humans and that slavery was ultimately about power. I also find the concept useful because it humanizes slave-owners—students might want to label them “evil,” but slave-owners did not see themselves that way. I am careful to emphasize that paternalism does not mean that masters treated slaves well; it means they took a personal interest in their slaves because of their own “self-image” as being “good” masters. This distinction is extremely important to make. According to Genovese, slaves manipulated this system by appealing to their masters’ paternalistic self-image to get what they wanted.⁹ Since Genovese’s work appeared in 1972, while historians have generally accepted the importance of paternalism in slavery in the antebellum South, they disagree on the extent to which slaves had autonomy. Peter Kolchin, for example, believes that many “arguments for slave autonomy have been overstated and eventually will be modified on the basis of future evidence.”¹⁰

Once I decided that the concept of paternalism would form the focus for how I would teach slavery, my next question was: **How can students begin to appreciate**

⁷For an alternative view, instructors might consider using Stanley Elkins’s classic work which discusses how slaves adjusted and adapted to the system of slavery. See Stanley Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).

⁸Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972).

⁹*Ibid.*, 3-7, 133-149.

¹⁰Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery 1619-1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 137-138.

what the historical concept of paternalism means? Here again I turned to Ken Bain's study that found that effective college teachers draw "solid connections" between the subject under study and students' lives. When they see a relationship between the subject being taught and their own experiences, students find new meaning in the topic and their motivation to learn increases.¹¹ But how can this be accomplished with slavery as the subject? It is difficult for students in the twenty-first century to relate to the slave experience. In addition to viewing the history of slavery solely within a rudimentary moral framework, slavery is an institution so foreign to them that many have trouble seeing its relevance.

A key question for me, then, was how to enable students to relate to the lives of slaves. Scholars who have studied slave courtship, such as Emily West and Marie Jenkins Schwartz, provided me with a direction. West and Schwartz discuss courtship between slaves, showing both the ways in which masters interfered in this intimate aspect of slaves' lives and slave efforts to maintain autonomy in courtship rituals.¹² Since courtship or dating is a topic that interests many college students, I decided that highlighting the relationships of slave couples might be an effective way to help students understand slavery, particularly because they could see how different their own lives are from that of slaves.

After lecturing on paternalism, I begin a discussion. The focus, however, is not immediately on slavery. Instead, the discussion centers on students themselves, putting them in relationship to the topic by posing the following questions:

1. Has anyone ever had parents tell you they don't like who you are dating?
2. Has anyone ever had a teacher or a boss tell you that you should or should not date someone? How would you react if they did?
3. What is the difference between having a parent tell you who you should and should not date and having a teacher or boss dictate this for you?

Once I elicited students' attitudes and experiences relating to interference from authority figures in dating, we compare that to slavery. I begin by explaining to students that masters involved themselves profoundly in the courtship of young slaves: Masters arranged for couples on different plantations to meet, encouraged specific matches within their own plantation, required permission for marriages, rewarded

¹¹Ken Bain, *What the Best College Teachers Do*, 39-40.

¹²See Emily West, *Chains of Love: Slave Couples in Antebellum South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 26-39; Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Born in Bondage: Growing Up Enslaved in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), Chapter 7.

marriages they liked, and presided over wedding ceremonies.¹³ Masters, in other words, took the role one would expect parents to take in relation to their children's courtship. I ask students to take a minute and speculate as to why slave-owners would care at all about romances between slaves. Here, I have a quick assessment tool to begin to evaluate whether or not students are able to apply the concept of paternalism.

Slave courtship, I expect students to understand, demonstrates how paternalism operated and the complexity of slavery. Unlike other societies with slaves, such as Brazil and Jamaica, where masters exhibited little concern about their slaves' personal lives, in the antebellum South owners interfered in the most intimate aspects of slaves' lives.¹⁴ They presented themselves as surrogate parents. They sought to maintain a paternalistic self-image through control of courtship. As Emily West writes, masters "believed they knew best when it came to their slaves' affairs of the heart." Yet, their primary concern was how romances would benefit them. Masters wanted slaves to procreate because the children of a female slave belonged to the master. Some masters helped couples they liked get together and stay together; other masters literally tried to "breed" their slaves.¹⁵

A discussion on how masters involved themselves in the courtship of slaves helps students appreciate the meaning of paternalism and begin to reconceptualize their understanding of slavery. Nevertheless, the ways in which slaves responded to paternalism also needs to be addressed. A lecture summarizing West and Schwartz on this issue could suffice, but not when I asked myself the following: **How can I engage students in such a way as to ensure that they fully understand the complexities of the master-slave relationship?** Here studies of history-specific cognition are instructive. They highlight the effectiveness of having students engage in historical thinking, particularly by having students work with primary sources. Such exercises enable students to understand better the nuances of topics being studied. As Robert Bain has argued, working with primary sources immerses students in the discipline of history, and helps them participate in the process of history cognition. The use of primary documents is also a way to apply constructivist educational theory to the field of history, as Michael Henry has shown. Constructivist theory, in summary, holds that students understand material better when they are engaged in a process of constructing their own knowledge by interpreting "materials to develop conceptual understandings." The basic premise is that this approach, instead of summarizing material, encourages students to create new ideas through analysis of primary documents. Primary documents also provide a means for the voices of people in the past to come alive in

¹³West, *Chains of Love*, 26-39; Schwartz, *Born in Bondage*, Chapter 7.

¹⁴Peter Kolchin, "Reevaluating the Antebellum Slave Community: A Comparative Perspective," *Journal of American History*, 71 (December 1983), 579-601.

¹⁵West, *Chains of Love*, 26-39; Schwartz, *Born in Bondage*, Chapter 7.

authentic ways and vividly demonstrate to students the historical drama of a given time period. Exercises developed around students' analysis of primary documents, moreover, provide a method for assessing students' understanding of the topic.¹⁶

One pedagogically useful primary source for the history of slavery in the Antebellum South is slave testimonies available as a result of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) interviews with thousands of ex-slaves during the 1930s. These testimonies are available at the Library of Congress website.¹⁷ They are also available in published collections, including *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves*.¹⁸ Many of these slaves discussed their teenage years in their interviews and often referred to their courtship experiences as slaves.

After a lecture on paternalism and a discussion of slave-owners' interference in slave courtship, I create a workshop atmosphere for students to do the work of history and examine these slave testimonies as historians. I pass out a series of questions that ask students to search for patterns among the documents and explore the concept of paternalism in terms of these documents (see Appendix).

Before handing out a selection of slave testimonies, I give students some background as to how the WPA gathered the testimonies. Significantly, there are limitations to this source that must be acknowledged. Most of the WPA interviewers were white southerners with some racial prejudices. Many of the ex-slaves, moreover, lived near their former master's descendants upon whom they depended for old-age pensions. Hence, some of those giving testimony might have been reluctant to speak negatively about their former masters. Continuing racial tensions in the Depression-era South, combined with black dependency on whites, inform both the questions and answers in the interviews. Finally, the reader cannot ignore the problems of memory when asking an elderly person to recall their youth. The language also sometimes makes the interviews difficult to read. The term "Marse," for example, referred to "Master" and the term "Ise" meant "I was." That said, the slave testimonies provide an invaluable source because they offer a first-hand account of slavery. Slave narratives written in the nineteenth century also do that, but only the most exceptional

¹⁶Robert B. Bain, "Into the Breach," 331-336; Michael Henry, "Constructivism in the Community College Classroom," *The History Teacher*, 36 (November 2002), 65-74.

¹⁷"Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938," <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>.

¹⁸Charles L. Perdue, Jr., Thomas E. Barden, Robert K. Phillips, eds., *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1991).

slaves were able to escape from slavery and later write about it. With slave testimonies, students get the view of the "typical" slave.¹⁹

This exercise provides an opportunity to evaluate students' learning.²⁰ My objective in providing students with a short series of documents with questions is to evaluate the extent to which they have understood the theme of the class session. Their answers, which I do not grade, provide me with a source to assess their understanding of slavery, particularly the concept of paternalism as it applies to slavery.

In evaluating the exercise, I am most interested in generalizations students make about what the documents illustrate in terms of the paternalistic relationship between masters and slaves. (See Appendix, Section B, question 1.) In their answers, the majority of my students appear to understand that the relationship between slaves and masters revolved around power. Students grasp that masters saw slaves as human beings, but saw themselves as having the authority to arrange everything for these human beings. The more difficult concept, that slaves were able to assert their humanness, but only within the limits of power set by masters, is not apparent to all students immediately. I have thus found it productive to follow up the exercise with a class discussion that focuses on the slave response to paternalism. We return to the primary documents and examine them more closely. For example, I ask students what it means that Mildred Graves (see Appendix) told her interviewer that when she and her husband were married "we jus' stepped over the broomstick" *before* they told their master. I also ask students why it might be significant that Fannie Berry (see Appendix) makes reference to slaves wanting to marry people on other plantations. What does that tell us about how slaves courted? This type of follow-up discussion enables me to address issues in students' understanding that are apparent in my assessment of their work on the exercise.

The student response to this exercise has been positive. Two themes are evident from their written comments in end-of-the-semester evaluations. First, students expressed a motivation for learning because the material "involved" them and "related" to their lives. Secondly, a significant number of students commented that they found

¹⁹John W. Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems," in *The Slave Narrative*, Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 78-98. Also see Donna J. Spindel, "Assessing Memory: Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives Reconsidered," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 27 (Autumn 1996), 247-261.

²⁰Angelo and Cross point out that effective classroom assessment methods are "formative rather than summative," and thus do not need to be graded. Quick exercises provide instructors with "feedback" on student learning. Thomas A. Angelo and K. Patricia Cross, *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers*, 2nd Edition (San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers, 1993), 5-6.

“meaning” in the material because of the “emphasis” placed on understanding a key “concept.”²¹

From my perspective, the strategy described in this article has been successful for several reasons. I have achieved my objective of providing a forum for students to better understand the master-slave relationship. But more broadly, this strategy has brought history to life for students, and many arrived at a better appreciation of what history is.

Appendix

Worksheet: Paternalism and Courtship in the Antebellum Southern Slave System

Directions: Break into groups of 3-4 students. In Section A, each student in the group should answer the questions for one of the documents. Then as a group answer the discussion questions in Section B

Section A

1. MRS. MILDRED GRAVES (B. 1842)

Yessir, I'm 95 years ole bit I kin lay here in my bed an' think 'bout my honeymoon jes' as if it was yestiddy. Sho' us jumped de broomstick. One day my husban'—course he wasn't dat den—well he come to me in de meat house an' say he want a word arter supper. I was a house gal, an' stayed in de house, an' he work in de field, so we didn't git chance to git together often. I met him dat ev'nin', an' we walked down to de pines an' set on de fense. Down dere he asked me to marry him. I say all right 'cause I was tired of livin' in de house where dey wasn't no fun. So we jus' stepped over the broomstick de next day, an' we was married. When I told Miss Julia, she gave me a cast-off dress of her'n dat fit me puffedly. Arter de war we had a real sho' nuff weddin' wid a preacher. Dat cost a dollar.

Source: Charles L. Perdue, Jr., Thomas E. Barden, Robert K. Phillips, eds., *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1991), 122. Reprinted with permission of the University of Virginia Press.

Questions: How does Mrs. Mildred Graves describe slave courtship? What does the document show about the master-slave relationship?

²¹Student Evaluations of Daniel Kotzin, HIS 025-070 and HIS 025-080, Spring 2006, Department of History, Kutztown University, Kutztown, PA.

2. MRS. FANNIE BERRY (b. 1841)

Miss Sarah Ann only had twenty, or thirty slaves. Sometime some 'ud die, but den dere was al'ways some bein' born, an' if a slave wanted to git married he had to come to Miss Sarah Ann an' git her to say it was all right. If you wanted to marry one on 'nother plantation, Miss Sarah Ann would fust fin' out what kinda nigger it was you wanted to git hitched to, an' if de nigger was a good nigger an' Miss Sarah Ann would try to buy him so husband an' wife could be together.

Source: Charles L. Perdue, Jr., Thomas E. Barden, Robert K. Phillips, eds., *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1991), 40. Reprinted with permission of the University of Virginia Press.

Questions: How does Mrs. Fanny Berry describe slave courtship? What does the document show about the master-slave relationship?

3. MR. CHARLES GRANDY (b. 1842)

In slavery days ef you want to git a woman an' you didn't have one, you an' de marser would stan' side de road 'till a big wagon loaded wid men, women an' chillum slaves would come by. Den de marser would stop de wagon an' buy you a woman. She would git off de wagon an' he would lead you bof to yo' cabin an' stan' you on de po'ch. He wouldn't go in. Nossuh, he read to you right at de door. He say sompin f'om de Bible an' finish up wid dis:

Dat yo' wife
Dat you' husban'
Ise you' Marser
She yo' Missus
You're married.

Today you don't stay together ez long ez Pat stayed in de army. Love was a lot mo' bindin' in dem days.

Source: Charles L. Perdue, Jr., Thomas E. Barden, Robert K. Phillips, eds., *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1991), 118. Reprinted with permission of the University of Virginia Press.

Questions: How does Mr. Charles Grandy describe slave courtship? What does the document show about the master-slave relationship?

4. MRS. KATIE BLACKWELL JOHNSON (b.ca. 1860)

Who married the Slaves? Man, folks didn't get married then. If a man saw a girl he liked he would ask his master's permission to ask the master of the girl for her. If his master consented and her master consented then they came together. She lived on her plantation and he on his. The woman had no choice in the matter.

Some good masters would punish slaves who mistreated their womenfolk and some didn't. No man, they didn't marry, 'twas as bad then as 'tis now. The masters were very careful about a good breedin' woman. If she had five or six children she was rarely sold. They generally made a present of the woman and her children to one of their children when they married.

Source: Charles L. Perdue, Jr., Thomas E. Barden, Robert K. Phillips, eds., *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1991), 40. Reprinted with permission of the University of Virginia Press.

Questions: How does Mrs. Katie Blackwell Johnson describe slave courtship? What does the document show about the master-slave relationship?

Section B

Conclusions based on group discussion:

1. Based on these documents, what generalizations can you make about the paternalistic relationship between masters and slaves? What have you learned about slavery by studying slave courtship?
2. What are the limitations of these documents? What other primary sources would you want to examine to test your answer to question #1?
3. None of the documents mention how slave parents involved themselves in their children's love life. As a group, answer how you think an ex-slave being interviewed in the 1930s would respond to the following question: How did biological slave parents involve themselves in the courtship of their children?

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR ENHANCING LECTURING IN HISTORY

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It can be **boring, monotonous, miseducational ...**

OR

It can be **motivating, intellectually stimulating, fun ...**

Consistent and constant criticism of the lecture method remains a staple of discussion and writing in academia. And most of the time it's deserved! The lecture has a history dating back to the first time that people needed to disseminate information.¹ The birth and expansion of the early universities of the middle ages saw the growth of the lecture as a means to transfer knowledge. Fortunately it was joined at many colleges by "disputation," usually conducted once a week. This permitted students to engage in questions and discussion with the master (the "professor"). Despite Johann Gutenberg's invention of moveable type permitting greater distribution of knowledge, the lecture lived on. As institutions of higher learning greatly expanded worldwide in the following several centuries (particularly the twentieth), commitment to the lecture has shown no sign of slowing. Those interested in improving this aspect of their teaching might wish to consider some or all of the following suggestions for enhancing their lectures.

I. Lectures must start with a "grabber."

Regardless of class size, motivation remains a major prerequisite of an effective lecture. Projecting a quote, a chart, a short reading, a problem, or a political cartoon and asking thought provoking questions provides an "anticipatory set" for learners. This permits (encourages, perhaps even forces) students to focus and react mentally. The professor should then integrate it into the presentation. In some cases there can be some benefit to e-mailing the "grabber" (aka "bell ringer") prior to class depending upon the course, lesson, and students. "Suggestions for teaching with excellence" in the "Berkeley Compendium" from the University of California at Berkeley advises teachers to "Plan the beginnings and endings of your lectures so that you can 'Open with Gusto' and 'Finish Strong.'"²

Historical cartoons are valuable "grabbers." Projecting an illustration on a screen as students arrive in class focuses attention upon the day's topic. One proviso: Spend

¹Coolie Vermer and Gary Dickinson, "The Lecture: An Analysis and Review of Research," *Adult Education*, 17 (1967), 94.

²Berkeley Compendium, <http://teaching.berkeley.edu/compendium/suggestions/file212.html>.

some time instructing the class on interpretation skills prior to using this methodology; this will enable students to operate at a higher cognitive level. I have identified some steps necessary to promote critical thinking through historical cartoon interpretation in a series of articles. I suggest exposing students initially to concepts such as caricature, symbolism, and satire and then after some instruction and practice proceeding to more sophisticated activities. The latter would include providing the class with a cartoon that omits the caption (title) and/or dialogue and asking them to provide the caption/dialogue with a justification of their position. This is critical thinking at its finest!³ A number of websites offer cartoons on current happenings and a number of books provide classic selections.⁴

Starting class with a “grabber” satisfies the demands of students that William Mugleston has identified in his research that “students would like classes to be stimulating, entertaining, *interactive*, not boring and have short breaks when there are long lectures” (author’s italics).⁵ The “bell ringer” political cartoon strategy is a powerful instructional and behavioral strategy encouraging students to stop talking with friends, close their laptops, focus on the visual, and think.

II. Lectures must be interactive.

In today’s world, interactivity is a component of everyday life for our students, ranging from iphones to e-mail to Twitter to the Web. Might clickers (personal response systems) be an option to consider—time will tell; YouTube certainly deserves serious consideration. How can a lecturer tap into this world for instructional benefit of students? Using occasional quizzes, asking discussion prompting questions, and providing problems for students to solve in class can assist in avoiding passive non-participation, but there is much more.

Visual aids, particularly film, provide opportunities for interaction with students. For example, when showing a video stop periodically and ask questions rather than wait until the end of the film. The instructor might write a series of questions on the board or e-mail them to students prior to class. Some teachers provide students with

³Ray Heitzmann, “The Power of Political Cartoons in Teaching History,” National Council for History Education: An Occasional Paper (1998); Ray Heitzmann, “Looking at Elections through the Cartoonists’ Eyes,” *Social Education*, 64 (September/October 2002), 314-319; and Ray Heitzmann, “Historical Cartoons: Opportunities to Motivate and to Educate,” *Middle States Council for the Social Studies Journal* (Spring 1990), 11.

⁴For example, for daily cartoons, see <http://www.Cagle.com> and <http://www.Slate.com>. See the National Archives website at <http://archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/index.html> for useful worksheets to accompany various types of documents, including cartoons.

⁵William F. Mugleston, “‘If Teacher Would Only ...’ How Students View Their College Experience,” *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods*, 31 (Fall 2006), 86-89.

a one-page handout with questions as they come into class. Students prepare answers and turn them in at the end of the class (at the end of the film) for assessment and grading. This works particularly well with students in the habit of napping during a film.

Case methodology can enhance teacher-student and student-student interactions. Carefully introducing a case focused upon dilemmas from history (e.g. approving the Treaty of Versailles or dropping the atomic bombs on Japan) can energize the class, resulting in excited interactions and of course motivation and learning. Case methodology has a long history of success in colleges, but it must be used with care to maximize its success.⁶ The creation of a positive classroom atmosphere remains a key to providing a climate for learning, and interactive lessons can be a major contribution to do this.

III. Lectures must not rehearse the textbook.

History textbooks serve as repositories for a particular segment of knowledge; in a survey course they provide a large component of the information. To encourage students to use their textbooks, professors should make frequent references to texts. Most importantly, they should carefully select parts of the text to use as a springboard to an in-depth explanation of an event. The following focuses upon some approaches.

In his classic *Social Studies: Theory and Practice* (1937), Edgar Bruce Wesley described the traditional lecture as "placing the learner in a passive position, restricting his activity to listening or note taking."⁷ Wesley's advice initially appears antithetical to this Third Commandment. However, Francis McMann pointed out that the lecture is "not incompatible" with new methods of teaching: "The criticisms of the lecture approach are not so much that the lecture method is inherently deficient but *the method has been badly abused* and narrowly defined" (author's italics). McMann further suggested that "After being introduced to a series of interpretations students can be given opportunities to develop their own varying historical interpretations or to validate a specific interpretation." He offered the following "historical model" for faculty to follow:

1. Historical Issue
2. Author and Source
3. Interpretation
4. Supporting Evidence
5. Refuting Evidence
6. Assumptions

⁶For guidelines, see Ray Heitzmann, "Case Study Methodology and Teaching Critical Thinking: Challenges, Charms, and Cooperation," *The National Social Science Journal*, 35, N. 2 (2007).

⁷Edgar Bruce Wesley, *Social Studies: Theory and Practice* (New York: D.C. Heath, 1937), 500-528.

7. Logical Consistency

8. Fallacies

9. Questions⁸

This strategy liberates students from the bondage of passive behavior so common in traditional lecture-plus-textbook-based pedagogy. Kenneth Stunkel suggests that some students tune out after ten minutes of a lecture.⁹ Given that instructors of history wish to educate all students, we must keep their attention and remember that textbooks should serve as an important supplement to lectures, not vice versa. Interactive lectures mitigate against this unfortunate passive behavior.

IV. Lectures must represent the latest thinking and research.

This Fourth Commandment defines the essence of the scholar-educator who shares new developments in the field with students. Diane Halpern observed that "most university professors do not know how to teach critical thinking ... to be effective ... they must engage their students in active learning in active learning techniques." Halpern suggests avoiding the "sage on the stage role."¹⁰ For one solution, the instructor can model how scholars of history frame questions and pursue answers through decision-making and problem-solving. Students can utilize this model in their work, internalizing critical thinking as an academic and personal skill. Frederick Jackson Turner's "Frontier Thesis" serves as a nice case study. The instructor can present the historical background, Turner's ideas, and his justification, and then offer opposing positions of historians. This case study utilizing historiography demonstrates how scholars develop new knowledge based upon serious research and reflection, a scenario students can and should mimic.¹¹

V. Lectures must contain humor.

⁸Francis McMann, Jr., "In Defense of Lecture," *The Social Studies*, 70 (November/December 1979), 270-71.

⁹Kenneth Stunkel, "The Lecture: A Powerful Tool for Intellectual Liberation," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 26, 1988.

¹⁰Diane F. Halpern, *Changing College Classrooms* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994).

¹¹Ray Allen Billington, *The Frontier Thesis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1996).

History teachers have an advantage over colleagues in other fields. History houses a wealth of stories that provide amusing anecdotes.¹² But there are caveats. Taste dictates a note of caution relative to the selection and explanation of "stories," particularly those that fall into the domain of "legend" as opposed to "fact." Accuracy should pervade all realms of teaching, including classroom humor. Recognizing that positive physiological and psychological benefits result from humor, "comic relief" can and should form a natural part of the history classroom.

Professors agree that students prefer a friendly style and respond positively to it. Furthermore, research endorses the use of humor in the college classroom. Powell and Anderson found that humor increases student attention.¹³ Korobkin's research endorses this point, listing benefits such as "attentiveness and interest, positive student-teacher rapport, improved individual and group productivity ... and most importantly retention of material."¹⁴ Many instructors have observed that humor decreases academic stress and anxiety. Parrott cautions instructors in this regard: "Avoid some of the pitfalls, such as ridicule, sarcasm, and racist or ethnic jokes."¹⁵ I would add "No sexist jokes!" Often at the end of the day watching a JibJab cartoon on line can amuse and edify the most tired history instructor.¹⁶ Might not this be true also for students at the end of a class?

VI. Lectures must humanize history and the social sciences.

Integrating biographies of the famous, the infamous, and, just as importantly, ordinary men and women into one's teaching brings to life historical events as well as activities in other disciplines. Individual lives can become stories for our classrooms. Talk about presidents such as Ulysses S. Grant, Teddy Roosevelt, and Bill Clinton; international leaders Catherine the Great, Liliuokalani, Winston Churchill, and Golda Meir; activists Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Delores Huerta, and Mary Lease who advised farmers "to raise less corn and more hell." In telling about the impact of rainfall on communities, discussing a family faced with water

¹²See James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), and Paul McBride, "The Pheasants Shot the Archduck' and Other Historical Truths," *Teaching History*, 12 (Spring 1987).

¹³J. Powell and L. Anderson, "Humor and Teaching in Higher Education," *Studies in Higher Education*, 10 (1985), 79-80.

¹⁴Debra Korobkin, "Humor in the Classroom: Considerations and Strategies," *College Teaching*, 36 (Fall 1988).

¹⁵Thena Parrott, "Humor as a Teaching Strategy," *Nurse Educator*, 19 (May 1994).

¹⁶See the collection of cartoons at <http://www.jibjab.com/>.

shortages assists with motivation and retention while providing insights to historical events. Snippets from a video such as "Surviving the Dust Bowl" from PBS's American Experience series would be magical in this regard. Local history offers another special and unique way to share the exploits of people who have contributed locally and nationally.¹⁷

VII. Lectures must respect the audience by utilizing students' multiple intelligences and learning styles.

Research from educational psychology suggests that faculty should consider students' individual differences in preparation and delivery of lectures. Presentations enhanced with visuals, sound, and class interaction enable students to increase their learning, understanding, retention, and enjoyment of history by tapping into multiple intelligences and addressing diverse learning styles:

- Visual Learners—Learn through seeing
- Auditory Learners—Learn through listening
- Tactile/Kinesthetic Learners—Learn through moving, touching¹⁸

Howard Gardner provides guidance to faculty with his models of the intellect. His categories include the following:

- Logical/Mathematical: Numbers, Clear Thinking
- Verbal/Linguistic: Writing, Poetry
- Rhythmic/Musical: Creating, Enjoying Music
- Bodily/Kinesthetic: Physical World, Athletics
- Interpersonal: Understanding Working With Others
- Visual/Spatial: Mental View of Relationship
- Naturalistic: Nature, Botany, Zoology
- Emotional: Maturity
- Spiritual: World Beyond Oneself, Religion¹⁹

Those of us who teach history enjoy numerous advantages. In addition to the information and anecdotes, serious and amusing, provided by the teacher, the World Wide Web can be a valuable resource. The WWW offers a fantastic video and still photographic collection of speeches, interviews, media coverage of events, and related information to enhance students' understanding of history and assist faculty to achieve lesson and course objectives. In addition, numerous audio recordings exist. Websites

¹⁷For example, see Judith Luckett, "Local Studies and Larger Issues: The Case of Sara Bagby," *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods*, 27 (Fall 2002), 86-97.

¹⁸"Learning Styles: Take Your Test," <http://www.ldpride.net/learningstyles.ML.htm>.

¹⁹Howard Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 5-12. Other researchers have added to Gardner's ideas, thus expanding the theory.

such as History.com and socialstudies.com both offer wonderful selections of supplemental materials for the instructor and student.

Picture the following: The professor begins class with some background information and then shows a short video snippet on the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, leading to a series of questions for the class. Accordingly, this introduction (“grabber”) to a lesson on the origins of World War I could be followed by additional biographical information on the Archduke and the Habsburg Dynasty. Developing a DVD library enables the instructor to enrich students’ understanding.²⁰

VIII: Lectures must be interdisciplinary.

Just as historians utilize interdisciplinary methods in their research, teachers of history can use many bodies of knowledge to support their pedagogy. Consider the unique contributions that each of the humanities (art, literature, music, philosophy, religion, and others) and social sciences (anthropology, economics, geography, political science, psychology, sociology, and others) can add to the learning environment. They can enhance investigation of issues as well as understanding of events. No other discipline is as blessed as history in its ability to utilize the resources of other disciplines.

To give some examples: Historians who teach a course or part of a course on geography can lend its approach through the teacher reading excerpts of a primary source document such as Giovanni de Verrazano’s commentary upon first arriving at the mouth of the Hudson River area in 1524.²¹ Teachers can draw from economics for analysis of the slave trade, and from sociology for insight about life on Southern plantations. American maritime history can tap the literature of the sea, perhaps having students read a classic such as *Two Years Before the Mast* to provide a picture of life at sea during the days of “wooden ships and iron men and women.” Marine art provides primary evidence of maritime activities and life on the lakes, rivers, and ports, and along coastal areas; film and photography likewise make important contributions. The music of sea shanties and scrimshaw art tell tales of life of the mariner as does the poetry of the sea.²² The following websites should prove beneficial for integrating maritime history teaching: www.maritimehistory.info, boatlinks.com/boatlink.html, www.shipindex.org, and www.hhpl.on.ca/greatlakes/homeport.asp. Interdisciplinary

²⁰The History Channel (<http://www.history.com>) has an extensive collection of quality DVDs for the classroom, many at reasonable prices.

²¹Susan Tarrow, in Lawrence. C. Wroth, editor, *The Voyages of Giovanni de Verrazano: 1524-1528* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 133-143.

²²Ray Heitzmann, “America’s Maritime History: A Frequently Forgotten Teaching Treasure,” National Council for History Education: An Occasional Paper (March 2007).

and multidisciplinary approaches clearly provide rich insights to enhance student understanding.

IX. Lectures must motivate, challenge, and inspire.

The eminent historian John Hope Franklin recalled in his autobiography the "riveting lectures" he experienced at Fisk College that opened the door to his lifelong love of history. His instructor, Theodore S. Currier, "gave riveting lectures on European and American history, embellished with anecdotes concerning real, live characters, ranging from kings and queens to prime ministers and presidents to industrial giants to common laborers; his lectures raised questions of how and why events occurred."²³ Franklin decided on history as a major, and his students (including this author) and the nation are richer for it. Perhaps another Franklin sits in our classes awaiting inspiration to appreciate history and assist others in its enjoyment.

As college teaching moves from the professor's role as "the sage on the stage" to "a guide by the side," we have opportunities to market history and ourselves.²⁴ This changing pedagogical paradigm, emphasizing student learning as opposed to our teaching, permits instructors to challenge students intellectually, perhaps inspiring them to take advanced coursework and graduate studies. Pacing of instruction through visuals, props, questions, and more should be keyed to the non-verbal behavior of students. Carefully utilizing questions, reading quotations, or planning teacher movements can stimulate a class that might start to drift. Often a positive comment in class or an encouraging annotation on a paper or test can serve as a preemptive motivational strategy.

Consider the following in terms of teacher behavior and instructional style. Echoing a point made earlier, Thomas Wenzel, a professor at Bates College, reviewed the literature on student attention during lectures: "Student attention decreases as the lecture proceeds ... students did well assimilating for five minutes after which confusion or boredom reduced attentiveness." He noted "a revival of interest" near the end of class.²⁵

Class size can dictate how a professor will challenge students; in smaller groups the lecturette (at 15-20 minutes) is a natural. This setting permits an instructor to springboard into discussion involving most students. But teachers can challenge

²³John Hope Franklin, *Mirror to America: The Autobiography of John Hope Franklin* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Grove, 2005), 44-45.

²⁴Ray Heitzmann, "Ten Steps to Classroom Success," *Middle Studies Council for the Social Studies Journal*, 1998 Yearbook, 155-158.

²⁵Thomas J. Wenzel, "The Lecture as a Learning Device," *Analytical Chemistry News & Features* (December 1, 1999), 817-819.

students even in large-group settings. Even with a "large class in a fixed-seat sloped lecture hall," Peter Frederick reported success:

Not all students talk, to be sure, unless I ask them to take five minutes and talk about a (primary) source in a pair or trios first before inviting the whole class to comment ... I have chosen to use this class time for helping students learn the important skills of doing history rather than covering content ... these methods of engaged, deep learning, usually thought to be possible only in tutorial or small class, can occur even in large classes.²⁶

Frederick challenges his students with pedagogy "outside the box." This learning experience encourages them to think critically and inspire them to appreciate history.

X. Lectures must summarize and preview the next lecture.

My Tenth Commandment contradicts the recommendation of David Kennedy, who suggested in an article entitled "How to Lecture" that "When you get to the end stop, I mean it! No postscripts. No afterthoughts. Let it go."²⁷ Times have changed in the new world of learning that emphasizes what students have learned rather than information delivery. This major sea change embraces and expects summarization (or closure in education jargon) to enhance learning and retention and asking questions at the close of class, hinting that some of them might appear on a future quiz or test, to assess student learning on the spot. Some teachers require students to turn in an index card at the beginning of the next class or at the close of a class, drawing from that day's materials, posing a question about material from the class; instructors might use these for test or quiz questions or as a "grabber" at the beginning of class.²⁸ This provides nice linkage between classes. An end of class review and assessment can also mitigate the frenzied closing of laptops and the rush to escape as class ends.

A technique successfully used by the media to tease an audience to continue to watch or listen or tune in the next show can provide another motivational and learning strategy. For example, consider the following scenarios: "For the first half of the next class a librarian will be here to assist you with your research paper and to answer related questions" or "I will be showing the first few minutes of a 'Saturday Night

²⁶Peter J. Frederick, "Engaging Students Actively in Large Lecture Settings" in *Engaging Large Classes* (Bolton, MA: Anker, 2002), 61, 65, and Peter Frederick, "Active Learning in History Classes," *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods*, 16 (Fall 1991), 67-83.

²⁷David M. Kennedy, "How to Give a Lecture," *History Matters*, 14 (September 2001), 5.

²⁸"The One Minute Paper," http://www.cuspomona.edu/~biology/teaching_bytes/one-minute-paper.pdf.

Live' skit on Congress and separation of powers at the beginning of the next class prior to our discussion of checks and balances." Those would be another kind of "grabber."

Conclusion

Can a teaching strategy—the lecture—that is centuries old, most recently having undergone decades of criticism, survive in the twenty-first century? The answer is "yes" if the pedagogy moves from teacher-centered to student-centered and incorporates some of the suggested Commandments. Of course, the whole process works (perhaps only works) when the lecturer is dynamic, confident, highly motivated, and most importantly enthusiastic.²⁹ While difficult to define, Gephart and others provide the following list of concepts of what make up an operational definition of enthusiasm: quality vocal delivery, good eye contact (not staring), natural body movement, strong gestures, vibrant facial expressions, high descriptive word selection, acceptance and encouragement of ideas, and finally an exuberant energy level.³⁰ Armed with these components the task of implementing the Commandments, while a demanding task, will result in much personal and student satisfaction.

²⁹Keith W. Prichard and R. McLaran Sawyer, *Handbook of College Teaching: Theory and Applications* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 91.

³⁰William Gephart, Deborah B. Strother, and Willard R. Duckett, "Enthusiasm," *Practical Applications of Research*, 3, No. 4 (1981), 1, 4.

BLACKBOARD OR BLOG? SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT CREATING AND ASSIGNING ON-LINE COMPONENTS IN COLLEGE HISTORY COURSES

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Introduction

As colleges and universities have adopted course management software such as Blackboard and WebCT, more and more history faculty have added on-line discussion components to their face-to-face classes. There are many reasons for this, not least a perceived need, expressed by many administrators and legislators, for more flexible class schedules, and a desire to fulfill that need by replacing traditional contact hours with hybrid and on-line courses. Some faculty have turned to weblogs, or "blogs," as alternate locations for collaborative classroom assignments. On-line formats can offer rewards, but they also present challenges for both students and faculty. For example, some institutions require that blog assignments be placed on private or password-protected domains in order to protect student privacy, whether or not the assignment is deemed to fall under the broader umbrella of FERPA regulation. Others regard blogs as a sort of presentation open to the public, where students learn to write for audiences beyond the classroom. There are advantages to both approaches and ultimately the decision rests in the hands of the institution.¹ Apart from technical and legal issues, using any sort of on-line discussion requires different pedagogical strategies, some of which are addressed below. Despite these challenges, blogging offers ways to engage students and to access and incorporate different media into student presentations that require the same levels of academic rigor as traditional printed and oral presentations.

This paper grew out of two panels presented at the International Medieval Congress at Kalamazoo, Michigan, in 2006 and 2007.² The discussions at those panels encouraged me to experiment with blogging in my own courses. What follows is a description of challenges and issues presented by incorporating such assignments, including getting students to participate, expected (and real) learning outcomes, assessing student work, and overall student/faculty response. In the end, I will offer observations on creating assignments that make the best use of blog technology.

¹The most popular blogs are Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com>), Typepad (<http://www.typepad.com>), and Live Journal (<http://www.livejournal.com>). All three allow password-protected communities and the ability to limit visibility.

²"Weblogs and the Academy: Internet Presence and Professional Discourse among Medievalists (a Roundtable)," 41st International Medieval Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo (2006), and "Weblogs and the Academy: Pedagogy, Professionalism, and Technical Practices (a Roundtable)," 42nd International Medieval Congress, Kalamazoo (2007).

Why On-Line?

Before beginning, it is important to ask why one might want to incorporate new technology. The answer seems obvious—our students are Internet-savvy and we want to tap into their interests. On-line assignments offer both faculty and students many new options for coursework. They also can help to address information and technology outcomes that many colleges and universities now include in general education requirements. Moreover, on-line discussions are sometimes easier for introverted students or for those who believe they are less able to “think on their feet” and prefer an asynchronous approach. They also allow students a place to refine or reconsider their ideas and arguments and to continue conversations that ended with the close of class.

Although many students have accounts at social networking sites such as Facebook or MySpace, the idea of an on-line discussion or blog as a workspace is often alien to them. The relationship of the students with the Internet for academic work is frequently passive; students use the Internet to get information, but they seldom see themselves as contributors or participants in a wider conversation. Even students who are expert at using social networking sites can be less comfortable with what they see as “forced” interaction with other students outside the classroom. Although “class participation” is something to which most students are acculturated, some consider outside collaboration an infringement on private time. To faculty, on-line collaborative assignments are a form of ongoing group work, but many students cannot see the communal aspect, instead dismissing such assignments as mere “busy work.” For them, the on-line classroom is a burden, not “a world in which students live.”³

Students respond much better and appear to get more out of on-line discussions when guidelines for assignments and their assessment are clear and assignments are built around open-ended questions. Faculty participation is also important: regularly addressing student comments, either by asking follow-up questions or offering positive, constructive criticism to reinforce the idea that what students have to say counts. A faculty presence also reminds students that on-line discussion is still coursework that matters. It is therefore important to remember that adding an on-line component can also significantly increase the amount of time a faculty member spends on the course. However, such assignments have their rewards: they can empower students and help them realize their own potential as writers and researchers.

Types of Assignments

³Allen Scarboro, “Bringing Theory Closer to Home Through Active Learning and Online Discussion,” *Teaching Sociology*, 32:2 (April 2004), 226. Scarboro’s view of the student relationship to “new-age media” presents the best possible case, but not, unfortunately, a universal one.

Based in part on my own successful experiences using both Blackboard and WebCT discussion boards in my classes, in part on the experiences of colleagues at other institutions who enjoyed success with blog assignments, I compared three different types of on-line class assignments over one academic year. I had used Blackboard discussion boards successfully for several years in survey courses, so I continued to use that feature for survey classes. The other assignments used two different blog formats in two different upper-division courses. Each class received a set of assessment guidelines via Blackboard and I posted grades on a bi-weekly basis. Credit for on-line contributions ranged from ten to thirty percent of the overall grade, with students expected to post their own work and to comment on the posts of others.

Outcomes and Assessments

For these on-line assignments, the listed outcomes were the same as those for face-to-face classes. Students leaving the course should demonstrate that they had acquired some ability to “think historically,”⁴ developed and used critical thinking skills and expressed those thoughts orally and in writing, learned to “do” history, at least to some extent, and, as a secondary outcome, finished the course with a better understanding of information technology than when they entered. In my courses, this means explicitly and implicitly helping students learn to see societies of the past not only for what they were in historical context, but also to recognize and avoid presentist interpretations. This is not only necessary for good historical thought, but it also is a way of thinking that helps students understand the complex global interactions and clashes of value systems that affect their daily lives. Obviously, none of these outcomes makes sense without including some mastery of content and a general narrative.

Assessing on-line assignments is both simpler and more difficult than it looks. The simple part is quantitative: did the students make the required number of log-ins and posts? The qualitative assessment of student contributions is somewhat more complex, but using a set of guidelines or a rubric is an obvious way to deal with this challenge. I set minimum standards for number and frequency of posts and distribute guidelines for good, thoughtful, constructive contributions to on-line dialogue. Ideally, students should respond directly to questions or comments raised on the board, use specific examples from primary and secondary sources, tie responses to previous conversations, start new discussion threads that provoke further discussion, and help peers understand the material. Because the primary purpose of discussion is to encourage students to engage with the material and enter into academic discourse, students who demonstrate even a moderate level of engagement have little difficulty in earning at least a B to B+ grade on each assignment.

⁴For one of the best recent discussions of what it means to “think historically,” see Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

The Assignments

Blackboard for Surveys

For World Civilization surveys, in the first semester, I assigned a standard discussion board and required students to post a minimum of three times over the week. I posed open-ended questions designed to help students integrate readings in the textbook with primary source readings, class lectures, and discussions. The questions were primarily thematic and often reached back to include topics we had already covered. For example, when discussing European voyages of exploration and the Columbian Exchange, I asked how European societies saw non-Europeans, following up with questions about how Muslims in Africa saw Europeans, how members of contemporary Asian empires saw outsiders, and how differences in reactions might be explained. To answer, students needed to reflect on primary source readings I assigned over several weeks. Some students were resistant to the idea of class discussion outside scheduled class time; they complained that it was "busy work." Based on student evaluations of the assignment, I modified the format for the second semester. The minimum number of posts remained the same, but students initiated their own discussions based on what they believed were the "muddiest" points for them over the course of the week.⁵ In both semesters, students who participated in the on-line discussions also performed better on in-class essay examinations and the sections with higher participation had better exam and overall grades.

Live Journal for Upper-Division Courses

For two upper-division courses, one on twentieth-century Europe and one on East Asia, I set up two different kinds of blogs. I chose Live Journal as the platform, because it is easy to use, access to the posts can be limited to members of the community, and basic accounts are free. Although the Live Journal format threads discussions, that was a secondary consideration. Because these were upper-division students, I wanted to see how blog technology might be used to provide a space for student presentations as well.

In the fall semester, students in the European history seminar used our class blog in two different ways. For the first seven weeks of the course, assignments focused on thinking critically about resources on the Web. Most of the assignments required a combination of reading primary sources and examining images or entire websites,

⁵I used a modification of a technique discussed in Barbara Walvoord and Virginia Johnson Anderson, *Effective Grading* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishing, 1998), 5-6.

evaluating them, and discussing them. The first substantive assignment,⁶ an evaluation of a website devoted to World War I,⁷ drew several responses to the questions, "Would you use this site for a class? Why or why not?" But there was little conversation between the students. One of the few examples was this trio of posts:

Student One: I would say that this site is quite useful for a class to use. It is full of insightful information such as maps, timelines, and historical information on numerous topics pertaining to WWI. The only discouraging thing that I could say about a site like this is that in order for one to be a good historian and/or teacher one should get their information from numerous sources. A site like this one being so convenient could cause one to stop their continued search for information.

Student Two: I agree with [Student One's] comment totally! The maps provide visual concepts to go along with the texts that you can read. I think that this site is also very convenient for someone looking for either quick information to get background on a subject or to look in depth at an issue as well.

Student Three: That's a good point about this site having so much info that someone might just stop at this one source.

Student Two's response was typical of comments students made to each other's posts. They did not engage with or write for each other at first; they wrote for an audience of one—the professor. Over the next few weeks, however, students' reactions to readings became more sophisticated, although they remained reluctant to critique each other's comments or respond in any but a positive manner. The next assignments also indicated that students who regularly discussed controversial or sensitive topics in class often were less willing to take a stand in a more permanent setting.

As part of our discussion of the Holocaust, the class read Art Spiegelman's graphic novel, *Maus*.⁸ I also asked students to look at several websites on the *Bund der Vertriebenen* (Federation of Expellees), an organization that seeks recognition for the plight of ethnic Germans, primarily in areas under Soviet control, driven from their

⁶The first actual assignment required students to set up their accounts and then join the community I created. Since this required some web expertise, I spent time in class walking through the technical details.

⁷Michael Duffy, "First World War.com," <http://www.firstworldwar.com>.

⁸Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale. I: My Father Bleeds History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).

homes after World War II. The students read through various articles, representing several points of view, and evaluated them for bias, accuracy, and intent.⁹ I then asked students how (or whether) they thought the inclusion of expellees in the larger discourse might affect views and interpretations of the Holocaust over time. The students each contributed fully to the first part of the assignment, but not the second. Their comments indicated that they judged all of the sites of equal accuracy.¹⁰

This led to an unplanned assignment in which I asked students to re-visit some of the Wikipedia pages they had selected. Each Wikipedia article comes with a complete history of all edits and a linked discussion page where authors explain and argue the merits of those edits. Students were to examine the article history and several pages of discussion for at least one of the articles in question and comment on what they found. Although the students appeared to have read the discussions, none connected the often virulent disagreements about issues and article content that had gone on behind the scenes to the finished product. I followed up on discussion in class, going over some of the articles with students. Again I posed my initial question on changing interpretations of the Holocaust. The answers were illustrative of how, at least for this group, the discourse had already changed. For them, the Holocaust was horrible and atrocious, but they saw it against the background of other genocides in their lifetimes. The topic was clearly a difficult one for the students, who seemed more comfortable discussing it together in class than on-line, perhaps because they were more able to gauge the tone of the conversation.

In the second half of the semester, students used the blog to support major class projects. The projects consisted of three parts: a blog post on their presentation topics that incorporated links to background reading; a twenty- to thirty-minute presentation with a question-and-answer session; and a review essay that underwent a group peer

⁹“League of German Expellees Unwilling to Investigate Own Past,” *Deutsche Welle*. 14.08.2006, <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,2135984,00.html>; John Dornberg, “Germany’s Expellees and Border Changes: An Endless Dilemma?” *German Life*, June/July 1995, http://www.germanlife.com/Archives/1995/9506_01.html; Geir Moulson, “Planned Berlin Memorial for WWII Expellees Triggers Eastern European Unease,” United Jewish Communities website, July 13, 2003, http://www.ujc.org/content_display.html?ArticleID=80896; Luke Harding, “PM attacks German president over expellees,” *The Guardian*, September 4, 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/secondworldwar/story/0,,1864246,00.html>; Ian Traynor, “Polish war dead log challenges Germany,” *The Guardian*, September 5, 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/secondworldwar/story/0,,1864876,00.html>; Wikipedia, “Heimatvertriebene,” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heimatvertriebene>; Wikipedia, “German Exodus from Eastern Europe,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_exodus_from_Eastern_Europe; Wikipedia, “Expulsion of Jews after World War II,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Expulsion_of_Germans_after_World_War_II.

¹⁰The ability of students to evaluate accuracy of sources is discussed in detail in Samuel Wineburg, “On the Reading of Historical Texts: Notes on the Breach between School and Academy,” *American Educational Research Journal*, 28:3 (Autumn 1991), 501-502.

review before completion of the final version. Comments on the posts were not required and very few were given. What was surprising was the range of posts. I asked students to provide links to scholarly source materials or to websites they judged trustworthy. Their selections ranged from a bibliography of ten scholarly articles that one student placed on reserve in the library to several lists of links to Wikipedia. Only two students linked to non-Wikipedia websites, while one linked to Wikipedia and to several scholarly articles she had downloaded and posted to her own domain. The repeated use of Wikipedia was discouraging, especially after repeated class discussions regarding its reliability.

The final assignment required each student to post short essays on either what they thought was the most important issue in twentieth-century European history or the issue they thought was given too much importance by historians or in popular conceptions of history. Most of the earlier assignments did not always meet the target of two to three comments per student, but this one averaged over five each. The comments were mostly supportive, but there were also a few questions and criticisms. I attribute this change in part to having spent several class hours on group peer reviews of the students' final papers. Whatever the reason, it was surprising that students remained uneasy with questioning each other or offering criticism in writing. These were upper-level students, mostly history majors, normally articulate and opinionated in class. It was also a contrast with my experiences with simpler discussion boards, where freshman and sophomore-level students had regularly engaged with each other on-line.

In the East Asian history course, blogging assignments took a different form. Since the students had little or no background in the subject, we focused on narrative and issues in class and used the blog for document analysis that usually takes up about a third of class time. After students had set up their accounts, I posted two texts for them to read, asking them to choose one or the other for a collaborative analysis.¹¹ I also gave them a set of questions to answer. No single student was responsible for answering all of the questions, but all questions required an answer. The questions were straightforward:

- What kind of text is this? What is the intended audience and purpose?
- Who is the author? What was his or her position in society? Might that position reflect a certain bias? How?
- When was the text written? What events were taking place at that time? How might a historian use these events to place the document in context?

¹¹“The 17 Article Constitution of Prince Shotoku,” trans. W.G. Aston, in *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697*, 2 vols. in 1 (London: Kegan and Co., 1896), vol. 2, 128-133, <http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/ANCJAPAN/CONST.HTM>, and “The Taika Reforms,” in Aston, *Nihongi*, 197-227, <http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/ANCJAPAN/TAIKA.HTM>.

- Choose one or two specific examples from the text and explain how you think a historian might use them to explain something about the society that produced the text.

Students answered the first three sets of questions immediately, but when they attempted to answer the last question, they paraphrased more than analyzed. We discussed their answers in class and worked on ways of framing answers that showed reasoned conclusions rather than simple paraphrasing and synthesis of information. Those classroom lessons did not always translate directly to the on-line environment. When students began to post individual document analyses, their posts ranged widely from a simple restating of document contents to more sophisticated levels I had seen in class discussion. The comment threads showed more serious attempts to analyze the texts themselves and some attempts to expand upon and critique the initial posts. Students also used the comment function to ask questions. For example, the first individual student post was an analysis of a series of texts on estate management in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Japan.¹² A widow had won a lawsuit that confirmed her inheritance not only of her husband's fief but also of his office. A student asked, "As far as women go, how would Yoshikane's widow deal with his military obligation?" This question resulted in conversation between the students, some of whom did extra research to try to answer the question, before I was able to provide a more direct answer.

After the first student post, I reviewed the assignment in class. I suggested that a way of making sure that the focus of the analysis remained on the text itself would be for students to use a formula to frame their ideas such as "The text mentions A and B, from which a historian might conclude X." This helped some students. Two weeks later, one wrote about a letter sent by the first Ming emperor to the Byzantine emperor:¹³

Aside from providing this background the author also provides the reader with a reason behind why the past governments (Sung, Yuan, etc.) failed. This failure in government as the document states was attributed to their fall from Heaven's grace due to "misgovernment and debauchery." The document continues to draw on these past governments' mistakes and makes the claim that the Ming rule came into effect due to their "patriotic

¹²Patricia Buckley Ebrey, Anne Walthall, and James B. Palais, *East Asia: A Cultural, Social, and Political History* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 216-217.

¹³Chu-Yuan Chang, "Manifesto of Accession as First Ming Emperor, 1372 C.E." in F. Hirth, *China and the Roman Orient: Researches into Their Ancient and Mediaeval Relations as Represented in Old Chinese Records* (Shanghai & Hong Kong, 1885), 65-67, edited by Jerome S. Arkenberg, Department of History, California State University Fullerton, at Paul Halsall, "East Asian History Sourcebook," <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/eastasia/1372mingmanf.html>.

idea to save the people.” This document tells us numerous things first and most importantly the continued tradition of the “Mandate of Heaven.”

Responses included comments on the idea of the Mandate of Heaven and on how the text revealed the importance of tradition in Chinese society. There was discussion over why the Ming Emperor would write to the Byzantine Emperor and whether—and how—the Chinese would have known of Byzantium’s fall to the Seljuk Turks. Conversations like these were one of my goals for the assignment. They also encouraged a different kind of participation on my part. Rather than asking additional questions or pointing students towards aspects of the texts I thought important, I used blog comments to give more positive feedback. I also used those conversations to begin class discussions that helped students grasp broader themes and make specific connections to information they had already learned.

Whether or not the initial “analysis” post met the assignment’s requirements, the discussions showed that students were thinking about the texts and relating them not only to class readings and lecture but to their own experiences. In comments to a post on two documents from seventeenth-century Japan that severely restricted interaction between the Japanese and Europeans,¹⁴ students discussed the effects Jesuit missionaries had on trade and relations between both Japan and China and Europe, drawing comparisons to other documents they had read. Responses to this post were typical in the way they reflected students’ attempts to connect the past to their world:

Student One: This seems so foreign to us because we are so used to our freedoms. We often forget that the history of other countries were [sic] definitely more severe, and in the case of Japan they felt they had to be.

[The student poster] sums up these two documents rather nicely. The Japanese government from these two documents was not open to outside influence of any kind. Whether it was “Southern Barbarians,” Christianity, or a restriction of certain goods the Japanese believed that in controlling these areas their culture and traditions would remain safe.

Student Two: Although we know now that Japan will eventually grow into an industrialized nation and some would easily say a world power, you have to wonder if the leaders in Japan were concerned about being left behind. In a time of expansion when the rest of the world is exploring and expanding borders, Japan is forcing itself to stay within itself. Do the

¹⁴The Tokugawa Shogunate’s “Closed Country Edict” of 1635 and a further edict excluding the Portuguese in 1639 are available in many sourcebooks and on several websites. The edition most of the students used is Sarah Watts, “World History,” http://www.wfu.edu/~watts/w03_Japancl.html.

leaders not fear being behind in development and power, or are they that self-assured that they are so superior that such expansion is unnecessary?

Comments such as these demonstrated that students had begun the process of “thinking historically.” Although no student posted as often as I had hoped, most students met or exceeded minimum posting requirements every week. As in the twentieth-century Europe class, students seldom offered criticism of each other’s analyses or comments, but they did clarify points and answer each other’s questions. Moreover, some students posted voluntarily on issues we had not had time to cover in class. In terms of fulfilling the intended outcomes, the second blog was much more successful. The students’ work showed that they were learning the material and, more importantly, learning to approach the material with a historian’s mindset. When I asked students about the blogs, however, those who had been in my survey class and used the discussion board preferred the East Asia blog to the discussion board, but those who had taken the twentieth-century course preferred the assignments from that course. When I asked them why, they said that they thought that they had more freedom and ability to be creative in the first semester.

Conclusions

My students made an interesting point that revealed a different understanding of the course learning outcomes. To them, “doing history” meant “finding information from multiple sources and presenting it in a coherent fashion.”¹⁵ The first blog had allowed that, but despite a clear feeling on the students’ parts that it was a better learning experience, the second blog was clearly more successful in terms of getting students to understand and use the texts. The problem lies, I think, in tailoring assignments to the technology. The assignments for the second blog could have been completed as easily on the Blackboard discussion board or in the classroom. Using blog technology for the assignment did not add any significant value—the blog was merely a location. Moreover, in the classroom, the discussion would have been focused and students might have felt freer to disagree with or critique each other’s interpretations. This is not to say that blogging doesn’t work, but as with any technology, the best assignments should take advantage of the unique strengths of the medium. The greatest strength of the blog environment is that it allows one to write essays that link to on-line articles, images, and other media. Blogs are built for the kind of creative assignment that students in the European history course found more

¹⁵This is akin to the “FAQ” model described in James Strickland, “Just the FAQs: An Alternative to Teaching the Research Paper,” *The English Journal*, 94:1 (September 2004), 23-28. As Strickland noted, the vast amounts of information available on the Web are conducive to this sort of presentation, but I would argue that well-constructed assignments and judicious use of the comment function can produce essays and research projects that contain the well-argued thesis most historians expect.

fulfilling and motivating,¹⁶ and an astute faculty member can create essay and presentation assignments that require appropriate academic rigor and citation. Doing so can give students new opportunities to enter into the larger academic conversation that exists beyond their password-protected classroom, while being true to the historian's trade.

¹⁶For one discussion of the importance of autonomy on student learning, see, Gad Yair, "Reforming Motivation: How the Structure of Instruction Affects Student Learning Experiences," *British Educational Research Journal*, 26:2 (April 2000), 191-210. Yair's study includes an assessment of the part played by student perceptions of autonomy and challenge in their motivation, which in turn affects their success in learning.

TEACHING WITH ON-LINE PRIMARY SOURCES: DOCUMENTS FROM THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

PERSPECTIVES ON THE "NEW IMMIGRANTS," 1903-1911

Michael Hussey
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On November 4, 1911, William Williams, Commissioner of Immigration at Ellis Island, penned a brief note in which he added some "finishing touches" to his annual report. In spite of his editing, however, Williams's report resulted in a protest from residents of New York's Lower East Side. They informed President William Howard Taft that Williams had referred to them as "ignorant" and of "filthy habits." Public officials, they argued, ought not to be allowed to issue "libelous charge[s]." Although the controversy diminished quickly, the debate between Williams and the Lower East Side's Citizens' Committee of Orchard, Rivington, and East Houston Streets, offers us a window into competing early twentieth-century views of immigration and urban life.¹

Between 1820 and 1880, nearly nine million immigrants arrived in the United States, the great majority from Germany, Scandinavia, England, Scotland, and Ireland. Beginning as early as the 1880s, immigrants increasingly arrived from southern and eastern Europe. Just under 55,000 Italians, for example, immigrated from 1871 to 1880. For the years 1881-1890, the number jumped to just over 300,000. Similar trends were also evident for Russians, Greeks, and groups from the Austro-Hungarian Empire.² These "new" immigrants spoke a wide variety of languages and many of them were Catholic or Jewish rather than Protestant.

This "newness" was deemed threatening by some, including Commissioner Williams. In a 1903 speech, he had stated that there had been a dramatic change in the quality of immigrants arriving in New York. He noted the "radical sociological, industrial, racial and intellectual distinctions which exist between the Anglo-Saxon, Teutonic, and Scandinavian races and the Slav, Magyar, Italian, Greek and Syrian races."³ He claimed that the Anglo-Saxon, Teutonic, and Scandinavian immigrants

¹File 53294/8-8b, Subject and Policy files, 1893-1957 (Entry A1-9), Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC, ARC number 3854680. Hereinafter referred to as File 53294/8-8/b.

²Arrivals of Alien Passengers and Immigrants, 1821-1913: By Nationalities and by Decades, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1913, 94. See: http://fraser.stlouisfed.org/publications/stat_abstract/page/18501/4227/download/18501.pdf.

³"Address delivered by William Williams, Commissioner of Immigration, in New York, on January 27, 1903, before the Federation of Churches and Christian Organizations of New York City," 1-2; available through Harvard University Open Collections Program: "Immigration to the United States, 1789-1930,"

(continued...)

"more closely resemble our people in blood, traditions and ideas of Government than is the case with any of the larger countries of Europe from which our immigrants come."⁴ Perhaps more ominously, Williams suggested, the "large influx of undesirable and unintelligent people from Southern and Eastern Europe may be at least one of the reasons why we do not get the better labor that used formerly to come here" from Germany and England.⁵

As he wrote in his 1911 annual report, the "new immigration" "proceeds in part from the poorer elements of the countries of Southern and Eastern Europe and from backward races with customs and institutions widely different from ours and without the capacity of assimilating ... Many ... have very low standards of living, possess filthy habits and are of an ignorance which passes belief."⁶ This "new" type of immigrant, wrote Williams, crowded into the tenement districts of Elizabeth, Orchard, Rivington, and East Houston Streets of New York's Lower East side.

Williams noted that for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1911, Ellis Island staff had inspected nearly 750,000 immigrants. He wrote that a large number of these immigrants were a "real benefit to the country." However, approximately 14,500 others were deported.⁷ He regretted that this number was not higher, yet he could not turn away those who while "able to earn a living, cannot in any sense be termed desirable. They are nevertheless admissible under the low requirements of existing law."

The Citizens' Committee of Orchard, Rivington, and East Houston Streets responded in quintessential American fashion with a letter of grievance and a petition.⁸ The Committee argued that not only were these claims untrue but that they were also "apt to arouse unwarranted prejudices against immigrants, and especially among immigration inspectors." Its members urged the President to "vindicate our reputation and that of our families and neighbors." The Citizens' Committee argued that while most of its members were of foreign birth, they sought to become citizens, to raise and

³(...continued)

at <http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/7434417>.

⁴Ibid., 3.

⁵Ibid., 4.

⁶File 53294/8-8/b.

⁷Ibid.

⁸The petition and report of the Citizens' Committee and Williams's rebuttal are available through the National Archives at <http://archives.gov/research/arc/>. In the search box, type the following Archival Research Catalog (ARC) number 3854680.

educate their children "as good Americans," to enjoy the "blessings of freedom," and to perform the "obligations which residence and citizenship entail."

In typical Progressive Era fashion, the Citizens' Committee also prepared a sociological study of its neighborhood, complete with detailed statistics. The study noted that the neighborhood included 624 "industrial establishments" (e.g., bakeries, mineral water factories, cap manufacturers, tailoring shops, and watchmakers); 671 "social centres" (e.g., libraries, synagogues, Hebrew schools, churches, moving picture places, and 112 candy and ice cream parlors); 745 "merchandise establishments" (e.g., delicatessens, egg stores, grocery stores, shoe stores, and clothing stores); and 191 professionals (e.g., lawyers, doctors, dentists, midwives, rabbis, piano teachers, and veterinarians).

In response to Commissioner Williams's fear that "new immigrants" would not assimilate, the Citizens's Committee cited evidence of "Americanization" in neighborhood libraries and schools. Of books checked out of her library, Miss Ida Simpson of the Seward Park branch reported that "while fiction (and it was invariably of the best kind) led numerically, sociology was second and economics third; 5,200 works in civics and American history are on the catalogue of this branch, but they are in constant use. Books representing simple methods for the study of English ... are likewise in great demand."

The neighborhood's Public School Number 188 had 2,500 boys enrolled in 1911. Of these, the Citizens' Committee report noted, only eight were arrested in that year and "they on charges that were trivial. There was but one who evinced serious moral delinquency." Indeed, the school offered an orchestra, glee club, literary societies, and athletics, all "useful factors toward Americanizing the children of this locality."

In October 1912, Williams informed President Taft that, in spite of the Committee's complaints, he was on record as in "praise of good immigration from whatever sources." He wrote that he had not said that all "or even a large portion" of the neighborhood's residents were of the disreputable "types" mentioned in his report. Some were, however, and this was "known to all who are conversant with the situation." The Committee's report, he argued, failed to include illiteracy rates, adult crime statistics, overcrowded housing, or that many of the "new immigrants 'herd' together, forming in effect foreign colonies ..., a sad but well established fact" The complaint and report of the Citizens' Committee was, according to Williams, a "misrepresentation" that sought to ignore unpleasant realities.⁹

Clearly, Commissioner Williams and the Citizens' Committee were not in agreement. However, neither of them had a monopoly on the truth. Both attempted to depict the Lower East Side in such a manner as to win the President's approval. Williams was correct that New York tenements were often dangerously overcrowded and unsanitary. The Committee's report did not mention this reality. However, the

⁹File 53294/8-8/b.

Citizens' Committee by its very existence proved that immigrants could quite successfully find a place for themselves within American life. Indeed their petition is a clear example of its members' grasp of their rights under the U.S. Constitution.

What emerges from these documents is a glimpse of a nation undergoing profound demographic changes. Vast numbers of immigrants arrived in New York and other ports, bringing new traditions, new foods, and new languages with them. At the same time, a country that had once been predominantly agricultural was becoming predominantly urban. Some sought to mitigate the worst of the new era's harsh realities, for example, overcrowded tenements and unsafe working conditions, through more efficient city management and governmental regulation. Still others, like Commissioner Williams, looked to the disreputable "types" of immigrants entering Ellis Island as the source of the problem and immigration exclusion as the solution.

Teaching Suggestions:

1. **Focus Activity:** Photographs of immigrants at Ellis Island are available through the National Archives website. Go to www.archives.gov/research/arc. Three examples are available by typing their identifying Archival Research Catalog (ARC) numbers into the Search box. These numbers are: 595034, 595650, and 594479. This will require three separate searches.

Also, photographs of early twentieth-century life in New York's immigrant neighborhoods are available through the National Archives website. Go to www.archives.gov/research/arc. Three examples are available by typing their identifying ARC numbers into the Search box. These numbers are: 535469, 535468, and 3854683. This will require three separate searches.

Ask your students to interpret these photographs through a series of questions. These could include: What do you see? Who do you think these people are? Where do you think they are from and where are they going? How do the images of the immigrant neighborhoods compare (or contrast) with the Ellis Island photographs?

It might also be helpful to use the photograph analysis work sheet at: http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/photo_analysis_worksheet.pdf.

2. Direct your students to the photograph with ARC number 595650. Ask them to imagine that they are one of the immigrants in the photograph.

Invite them to read the Citizens' Committee's description of its neighborhood (in pages 1 through 7 of their study) from the perspective of this immigrant. Ask them to imagine what he or she thought of this neighborhood. They should also

draw on clues that they find in the photograph. Encourage them to take notes about their impressions.

Facilitate a class discussion in which students share “their” immigrants’ views.

[For access to the petition and report of the Citizens’ Committee and Williams’s rebuttal, visit <http://archives.gov/research/arc/>. In the search box, type the identifying ARC number 3854680.]

3. Share the information from the background essay on Commissioner Williams’s views of the “new immigration” and the Lower East Side of New York. Also, review with your students the photographs cited above and this article’s featured document.

Assign your students to write a letter from one of the immigrants in the photographs to a friend or family member in Europe that draws on these primary sources. The letter should describe what they have seen in New York and their opinions of their new home.

4. In their petition to the President, the Citizens’ Committee wrote that they had immigrated to the United States with the purpose of “rearing and educating their children as good Americans, and of enjoying the blessings of freedom, at the same time assuming and performing the obligations which residence and citizenship entail.”

Divide your students into groups of three or four. Ask them to list and discuss terms that come to mind when they hear the phrases “the blessings of freedom” and “performing the obligations which residence and citizenship entail.” Then have the students reconvene as a class to further discuss their views.

5. Involve students in a writing simulation. Instruct them to write “letters to the editor” or “open letters to President Taft” in response to Williams’s statements as if they were citizens of the tenement districts. Lead a discussion based on these letters and on how Williams might have responded to them.
6. Ask your students to write an essay in which they formulate their own portrait of the “new” immigrant’s life on the Lower East Side of New York. What portions—if any—of Williams’s views or that of the Citizens’ Committee do they find convincing? They can also draw on the photographs in their formulation.

Additional Resources:

- For photographs of Commissioner William Williams, Secretary of Commerce and Labor Charles Nagel, and President William Howard Taft go to the following link: <http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/id?1693109>.
- One of the signers of the Citizens' Committees' petition lived at 97 Orchard Street, the current home of the Tenement Museum. Their website, <http://www.tenement.org/>, includes additional information on immigrant life and further teaching activities.

BOOK REVIEWS

P. Sven Arvidson. *Teaching Nonmajors: Advice for Liberal Arts Professors.* Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008. Pp. 128. Paper, \$17.95; ISBN 13: 978-0-7914-7491-4.

Teaching non-majors can be a tedious task in the liberal arts college. Students might not engage academically and instead treat the course as "a waste of time." Differing attitudes fill the classroom and might cause interruptions, passive-aggressive behavior, or absenteeism. *Teaching Nonmajors: Advice for Liberal Arts Professors* addresses many roadblocks non-major students can create in the classroom. However, the text directs instructors to teach non-majors in a logical, positive, and student-centered manner. Author P. Sven Arvidson does not start with the student, but the professor. He addresses essential guidelines professors incorporate into the syllabus, classroom environment, pedagogy, and professional development.

According to *Teaching Nonmajors*, the foremost "goal ... is to encourage [non-majors'] interest in our discipline and to see how it relates to their daily lives, their future, and the discipline they have chosen for their major." Arvidson asks the question, "What do we do?" He answers the question in eight chapters starting with "Give Better Lectures." Chapter 1 emphasizes the passion of teaching and connecting with the students. He challenges professors to "be themselves," alter pedagogy to surprise students, know content knowledge, and establish time for question and answers. Chapter 1 also includes avoiding the lecture trap, strategies to improve lectures and discussion of a course notebook. Chapter 2, "Break Up Lectures," provides relevant methods to keep the lecture moving in continuity but presenting different opportunities to discuss content, create disequilibrium and reflection time for students to generate their own knowledge. Adding methods that "break up" the lecture creates an efficient classroom teaching approach. Chapter 3 highlights discussions and "how to" produce constructive discussion in the classroom environment. Debriefing and student presentations conclude the chapter emphasizing advance preparation of the professor. Chapter 4 or "The Art of Assignments" stresses designing reflective assignments to maintain the flow of the course and make "grading less painful." The chapter reviews techniques for constructing reading, writing, written exams, and oral assignments. Chapter 5 or "Sensible Policies" encourages professors to familiarize and construct the course syllabus with university policy. Hints and suggestions to produce a well-balanced syllabus include communication, attendance issues, and plagiarism. Chapter 6 focuses on problems with professors and students. It gives examples of disruptive student behavior in class, broken university/classroom policies, shy students, and students with disabilities. One important message is to inform the dean of conversations with problem students and provide documentation. Chapter Seven or "Understand and Improve Student Ratings" once again charges the professor with the responsibility to know the rating system and encourages secondary written evaluations to improve teaching strategies. Chapter 8, the conclusion, reminds professors to plan opportunities for students to leave the course asking questions about course content and reflecting on their personal life and future. Students should leave "with the intellectual tools and

cognitive lenses of that course's discipline to start to connect that horizon to the ground which they walk."

Teaching Nonmajors: Advice for Liberal Arts Professors is a versatile tool for professors at a liberal arts college. I would highly recommend this to seasoned professors but especially new professors. Working at a university is challenging with all the demands on a professor professionally, but the added work of engaging non-majors is a struggle. This text provides solid guidelines to equip a professor for a successful and less stressful academic year.

University of Oklahoma

Star Nance

John Tosh. *Why History Matters*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Pp. 192. Paper \$19.95; ISBN 978-0-230-51248-3.

In his fascinating book on the place of history in modern society, John Tosh, a social historian at Roehampton University in the United Kingdom, begins with the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Blithely ignorant of the historical forces and precedent in that region, Anglo-American citizens later would be surprised by Iraq's turmoil in the months and years that followed an apparently easy conquest. Other than the 1991 Gulf War, few had any inkling of past interventions or knowledge that British troops had fought their way to Baghdad during the First World War and, in the process of establishing its mandate, took heavy casualties in a series of revolts and insurgencies. The legacy to the modern world was an artificial state with Kurdish and Shiite majorities controlled by a Sunni Islam minority, multiple coups against dictatorial governments, and the ultimate dictator in Saddam Hussein. In Tosh's view, those watching speeches by Tony Blair and George W. Bush were generally unaware of the narrative of Iraqi history. Without this perspective, citizens of these democracies were unable to participate rationally in the political debate. What makes Tosh's message especially interesting is that he places much of the blame for the uninformed citizen squarely on the backs of modern historians who "are strangely reluctant to adopt the role of expert" in ongoing political debates.

The author explores the value of history to the democratic process. In an interesting observation, he notes that modern politicians and those who make up the governing class are "less minded and less qualified to draw on the lessons of history than were any of its predecessors." Yet, this absence of perspective has not prevented modern politicians from Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, to Tony Blair and George W. Bush, from using their own versions of national history to drum up popular support for their political programs. Tosh artfully illustrates the disconnect between fact and fiction by demolishing Thatcher's use of the Victorian age as a model for late twentieth-century social and economic programs. Rather than a golden age, especially for the family as Thatcher alleged, the Victorians lived in an age of economic insecurity, crime, prostitution, unplanned pregnancy, as well as child and wife abuse. Most citizens

of the period were not bourgeoisie but working class and lived according to different norms than those observed in middle-class photographs of the era.

It is the job of the historian, Tosh argues, to enter into the public discourse and challenge analogies the government propagates out of context. While the historian is not the provider of the solution, he or she can help shape the public debate by linking the present with both the past and the possibilities in the future.

John Tosh is an English historian and addresses his message primarily to historians and history students in the United Kingdom. However, American historians, as well as upper-division and graduate students, will find this short work engrossing and the author's comments and illustrations easily transferable to modern America. Teachers will find it contains more than enough grist to use as the basis for seminars on the role of history and its value to the modern era. It is a superb, thought-provoking book that should be in every history teacher's library.

United States Army Command and Staff College

Stephen A. Bourque

Linda S. Levstik and Keith C. Barton. *Researching History Education: Theory, Method and Context.* New York: Routledge, 2008. Pp. 440. Paper, \$51.95; ISBN 978-0-8058-6271-3.

This volume presents a compendium of work by two outstanding social studies education researchers, Linda Levstik and Keith Barton. Its basis rests upon their previous work that has focused on how children and adolescents learn, develop, and apply historical thought and reasoning. The present book extends these efforts through the authors' discussions of the processes involved in their research as well as additional and updated material.

Much of the information noted here centers on the dissection of classroom research that analyzes the introduction of various historical and social studies instructional paradigms used in both elementary and high school classrooms and their effects on the development of both a child's and adolescent's historical thinking. These projects range from how children build a sense of time and chronology to perspectives of historical change. At the heart of these chapters is a continual concentration on the nature of how an historical thinking model might be constructed, used, and evaluated in elementary and secondary classrooms. This is done through developing an understanding of the context of young and adolescent learners and how they build a knowledge base that allows them to view history through a critical lens. The authors offer these thoughts by guiding the reader through a discussion of an idea, or issue, that each of the chapters will center on, providing a classroom example that leads to a research problem, and then concluding with an overview of experimental findings with concurrent analysis. Following these are summary thoughts that tie the chapters together along with an extensive bibliography.

These frameworks are initiated from both national and international perspectives. For example, one of the selected studies compares groups of young students in the United States and Northern Ireland in terms of their socio-cultural perception of historical change. Yet another talks about New Zealand high school students understanding of their national history. The use of interviews in gathering much of the data provides the reader with a framework from which one can begin to understand a child's historical understanding. These research constructs offer the reader a great insight into the developmental aspects of historical learning.

It is interesting to note that the authors do not limit their research techniques to a qualitative vein. Indeed, their research perspectives are wide ranging and present the reader with a variety of excellent classroom experiments.

While the audience of this book is clearly aimed at post secondary history and social studies education professionals, those teaching history at the elementary and high school levels will also greatly benefit from studying Levsitk and Barton's analysis of historical reasoning so that they might understand these applications and thus move towards improving their student's historical skills. These treatments provide a guideline to the higher level of critical thinking and reasoning skills needed by today's students to successfully understand historical frameworks and concepts.

The University of Texas at San Antonio

Richard A. Diem

Nena Galanidou and Liv Helga Dommasnes, eds. *Telling Children About the Past: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*. Ann Arbor, MI: International Monographs in Prehistory, 2007. Pp. 324. Paper, \$25.00; ISBN 978-1-879621-40-4.

Telling Children About the Past is an anthology of essays on a diversity of subjects. The focus is on representing the past to "younger audiences." I found it interesting to see that neither of the two editors and none of the contributors are historians in the usual sense of the word: The editors are archeologists and most of the contributors are archeologists or psychologists. Because many of the authors' academic interests are in archeology, most of the chapters focus on the distant past.

The book includes sixteen chapters divided into four parts. The chapters in Part I, "Learning Paths: Cognitive and Psychological Perspectives," are written primarily by psychologists who are interested in the ways in which children come to understand the past. The authors examine the neuro-cognitive and psychological processes that are involved in enabling young people to relate to, recreate, and appreciate past events.

The three other sections of the book examine modes in which the past is conveyed to children. In Part II, "Contexts of Telling I: Digital and Printed Media," three scholars look, in turn, at films, electronic games, and book illustrations. Another compares an author's version of a book with the final, published version. These scholars reveal the contradictions between what scholars know and have written about and what is

presented to children via popular media. The last essay of this section takes a more optimistic view of digital and printed media by presenting the author's experience of his own illustrated children's books.

A helpful critique in this section is Helaine Silverman's chapter on Disney's "visually stunning" film, *The Emperor's New Groove*. Unfortunately, according to the author, Disney created blatant stereotypes and constructed a past that blurs the line between the simulated and the real. Because of the popularity of Disney's films, this chapter might be of special interest to teachers, parents, and other adults, who should be concerned about the false information and images of people and civilizations of the past that are fed to youths and the public at large.

In Part III, "Contexts of Telling II: Museums and Cultural Heritage Sites," the authors argue for creating museum environments that can convey aspects of the past effectively to children through the use of language, family-friendly exhibitions, mixed media, and hands-on activities. One successful interactive activity is discussed in chapter eleven by Lauren Talalay and Todd Gerring, who describe a program at the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, where museum educators teach children about Egyptian mummification practices using a Barbie doll and candies.

Part IV, "Contexts of Telling III: Schools and Special Classrooms," is the final section of the book. It includes three chapters that offer case studies that explore issues of ethnicity and nationhood in very different locales. Chapter 14 presents the Lakota ways of relating the past; chapter 15 examines Brazilian government policy regarding national heritage, and chapter 16 discusses the teaching of prehistory to children in Romania.

The quality of the essays is uneven, but as a whole, the writing is clear and the essays offer a variety of insights into the teaching and learning of the past. Those who would find this collection most useful would likely be public historians, museum educators, and early childhood and elementary school teachers.

University of Hawaii

Eileen H. Tamura

Frank W. Elwell. *Macrosociology: The Study of Sociocultural Systems*. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2009. Pp. 492. Hardback, \$129.95; ISBN 13: 978-0-7734-4900-8.

Frank Elwell's *Macrosociology* is a rare find because it is well written and accessible, yet treats its subject, sociological theory, in the proper manner. Elwell's choice of theoretical traditions covers the "big three" classical thinkers—Marx, Durkheim, Weber—but the readers might find themselves pleasantly surprised by the inclusion of Robert Malthus. The book is broken down into sections based on these four essential theorists, with additional chapters in each section covering thinkers whose ideas build upon or complement the classics. For instance, to Weber's treatment of

rationalization, Elwell adds George Ritzer's recent and popular notion of "McDonalidization"—an idea that brings familiarity to a concept otherwise intimidating to many students.

Elwell's prose is above all else down to earth. His writing style somehow upholds the complexity of the ideas in question, while making readers feel as if they are talking with a trusted and thoughtful friend. Many writers attempt this but few succeed—*Macrosociology* is simply a pleasant book to read, a refreshing deviation from the norm.

In his chapter on Emile Durkheim, Elwell candidly admits his (previous) longstanding lack of familiarity with Durkheim's ideas. He then mentions his use of sources by the Durkheim scholar Stjepan Mestrovic—and subsequent realization of the significance of Durkheim's ideas. Having some familiarity with Mestrovic's work, I can attest that Elwell has tapped the right source. Though perhaps better known for his postmodern writing, Stjepan Mestrovic was instrumental in making Durkheim better understood and relevant to contemporary sociologists.

Durkheim is, unfortunately, often watered down and misunderstood in texts accessed by undergraduates. Elwell's treatment of Durkheim helps remedy this by identifying the classic thinker's most important ideas, though not necessarily those held to be important by conventional textbooks. This pattern holds for other theorists covered in *Macrosociology*, and what is perhaps most refreshing about Elwell is his judgment in this sense.

The choice of Robert Malthus is an interesting one, and reflects the book's tendency to favor ideas rooted in material realities. Sociology is, to understate the case, abstract, and yet good theorists ultimately tie their notions to the exigencies of day-to-day life. Malthus certainly does this as he points out the harsh realities that characterize the relationship between populations and resources. Elwell's chapter on Malthus, which elaborates in an eye-opening manner his lesser known yet still relevant ideas, fomented in myself a new respect for the eighteenth-century demographer, who clearly deserves more careful attention from sociologists and historians alike.

Teachers of history will find *Macrosociology* useful as both a history of social thought and a sociology that can, like all good sociology must, take history into account. Sociology as a field is primarily interested in explaining the emergence and nature of modernity. Those who take Elwell's book seriously will gain direct knowledge of the history of modernity from thinkers (like Max Weber) who favor the historical approach, but should also internalize sociological ideas and concepts that have the potential to augment subsequent interpretation of historical data. Sophisticated and comprehensive enough for use in graduate courses, *Macrosociology's* accessibility makes it equally appropriate for undergraduate students.

Peter F. Nardulli, ed. *International Perspectives on Contemporary Democracy*. Urbana, IL: University Press of Illinois, 2008. Pp. 208. Cloth, \$23.00; ISBN 978-0-252-07544-5.

This collection of essays explores the causes for the spread of democracy over the past two decades, and the prospects for its further spread in the twenty-first century. Roughly half of the collection engages democratization theory and recent cases of the spread of democracy, with the other half considering the challenges or possibilities of globalization for democratic governance. To the editor's considerable credit, the collection achieves the rare goal of bringing together essays that engage each other, are written clearly and cleanly so as to be accessible to the non-specialist, and contribute to the scholarly agenda. In this light, the volume is highly recommended for history teachers of recent global history, U.S. foreign policy since 1945, and specialists on democracy or political ideology.

Overall, the authors addressing democratization theory provide both a good introduction to current scholarly debates and advance their own discrete scholarly contributions. The essays by Larry Diamond, Zachary Elkins, and Bruce Russett consider the "third wave" of democratization of the 1970s to the 1990s and the possibilities and mechanisms for a future "fourth wave." This includes, for the non-specialist, discussion over how to define "democracy" that should prove particularly profitable. Finally, Lisa Anderson argues that western scholars "privilege" liberal democracy, assuming it to be a universally desirable system of government and creating over-expectations for democracy's spread.

Turning to the contributions on globalization, the first three chapters by James Kuklinski et al., Wendy Rahn, and Beth Simmons discuss the impact of globalization on citizenship. For Kuklinski and his co-authors, this is a question of the capacity of democratic citizens to make informed choices regarding increasingly complex, global questions. Rahn and Simmons consider how the transfer of "civil commitment" from the territorial nation-state to international organizations and the larger global community challenges democratic civil society. Finally, John Freeman and Melissa Orlie raise questions about the role and compatibility of global markets and democracy.

As a collection drawing primarily from a political science perspective, assigning the collection for a history course might prove challenging, depending on students' background knowledge of social science methods. Selected essays can be used profitably to enrich upper-level history courses on political ideology and on globalization, and the entire text might be useful for courses focusing on the discrete issues raised. More broadly, for global history or western civilization surveys, the texts—particularly that by Simmons—are suitable for provoking student discussion over the nature of democracy and globalization. Given the social science basis, the essays might also be used to good effect in courses on historical methodology to consider and contrast both broad approaches. The historical profession's concerns over context and primary sources might be played against the authors' use of quantitative, data sampling,

and modeling. Overall, the collection does not provide an easy, read-purpose course text for most history courses but does provide much to recommend it as a source for lecture material or for supplementary texts.

College of William and Mary

James Frusetta

Warren Breckman. *European Romanticism: A Brief History with Documents.* Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008. Pp. 240. Paper, \$14.95; ISBN 978-312-45023-6.

European Romanticism: A Brief History with Documents is another title in the Bedford Series in History and Culture. Well-organized and well-written, these books are designed for the student of history. Breckman's volume is another fine addition to this series. An eminently readable, forty-page introduction forms Part One of this book. Here Breckman defines Romanticism as a historical concept and considers its legacy, then moves to a discussion of its rise to significance in the years of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Individual sections follow: These examine the French Revolution's role as catalyst and the main features, but importantly the key similarities and differences, of the English, German, French, and European Romantic movements. Breckman then nicely links this cultural examination to Romantic Nationalism before providing readers with a concise conclusion that collects together the many strands of this broad, complex movement.

Part Two contains the primary source documents that are the heart of this volume. Author Breckman provides twenty-two documents of varying lengths (average seven pages) and types and augments these with well-chosen visual evidence (a total of eight works of art). Presented chronologically, with but a few exceptions, these sources feature a good range of voices, and include better known pieces such as William Wordsworth, *Preface to "Lyrical Ballads"* (1800); Francois-Rene de Chateaubriand, *The Genius of Christianity* (1802); and Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry* (1821). But importantly, readers also encounter lesser known selections: Among these are Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, *Of Two Wonderful Languages and Their Mysterious Power* (1797); Karoline von Günderrode, *Idea of the Earth* (ca. 1806); and Victor Hugo, *Preface to "Cromwell"* (1827). Each source features an introduction on both text and author. Taken together, this is a balanced mix of English, German, French, and European examples. Among the appendixes are a helpful six-page "Chronology of European Romanticism (1789-1848)" that places cultural events of Romanticism in a wider historical context. Readers might find this helpful as they attempt to keep the many authors and ideas in time perspective.

How might an instructor use this book? The many volumes in the Bedford Series are written specifically with classroom use in mind, thus making course adoption a logical step. With its brief, focused introduction, and individual primary source

selections, *European Romanticism* would be an ideal addition to secondary classrooms, but also introductory university offerings in Western Civilization or World History or second-year courses in post-1750 European history. Instructors could elect to use some, or all, of the documents, depending on the focus of the course and the amount of time available for the subject matter. With regards to classroom adoption and use, helpful in this respect are "Questions for Consideration," in the appendixes. Instructors have a ready set of in-class discussion topics or project assignment starters.

Drawbacks to this book are few. The artwork is reproduced in black and white only, and the quality isn't always the best. Still, through these learners can gain some appreciation of the author's main points here. Also, several sources might have been excerpted a bit more carefully, to produce selections of less than ten pages. But these shortcomings do not detract from the overall positive impression.

In sum, Breckman's *European Romanticism* is an excellent classroom volume on this significant topic. Readable, brief, and with a very good set of primary sources, instructors at various levels could adopt it with confidence. Strongly recommended.

Concordia University—St. Paul

Thomas Saylor

Michael Paterson. *A Brief History of Life in Victorian Britain: A Social History of Queen Victoria's Reign.* Philadelphia: Running Press, 2008. Pp. 358. Paper, \$13.95; ISBN 978-0-7624-3518-0.

Much has been written of Queen Victoria and British society during her lengthy reign. Much has been presented about the advancements made by the time of her passing in 1901. Notwithstanding the fact that some scholars might suggest that in light of the volume of narratives already composed on Victorian History no more are needed, *A Brief History* shows that there is still much to learn. Asserting that the Victorian Age has dominated the popular British imagination like no other, Michael Paterson affirms that the surfeit of stories and myths surrounding the Victorians have thus produced a misrepresentation of what life was truly like during the reign of Queen Victoria.

Composed of an introduction and eleven chapters, *A Brief History* opens with an appraisal of Queen Victoria, a lady described by Thomas Carlyle in 1837 as being so young and naive that she couldn't be trusted to select a hat, a lady who nevertheless in later years transformed herself into the symbol of her age. Although Paterson's tome does not necessarily introduce a range of groundbreaking data to enlighten the already deeply informed of Victorian Britain, as his biographical chapter on Queen Victoria demonstrates, what he does adroitly tender as the book unfolds is an exclusive standpoint from which to reconsider key individuals, events, laws, and cultural turning points. As chapter two, "The Masses," reveals, while the overcrowded cities, working of children, and the domestic servitude of young, working-class women are well-known images of Victorian life, the reality is not so clear cut. As a case in point, the stereotype

that has been formed of Victorian servants as repressed, obedient folk is, states Paterson, quite simply wrong. Drunkenness, clumsiness, petty thieving, and dallying would be more apt to describe the average domestic hand.

Moving through a range of topics that include diet, interior design, the presence and influence of religion, behavior and manners, leisure, the mass media, and Britain's relationship with the wider world, Paterson offers the thesis that the Victorians as the world's first modern urban citizens were, to put it bluntly, a rather odd lot, hence the mythology surrounding them! Reacting in many instances to the problems instigated by the industrial revolution, the Victorians thus created numerous rituals and codes, many of which were downright bizarre given our present-day mindset, from which they were able to cope with the wonders and problems that modern life manufactured.

Sadly lacking in visual representations, and at times shallow in intellectual rigor, Paterson nonetheless offers an interesting and insightful perspective to Victorians and their culture. Of possibly best usage with an introductory undergraduate program, and with a large number of short sub-sections, *A Brief History* is a text readily workable for instructors. Not stuffy in prose and cheap in price, *A Brief History* does though contain flaws. For example, in terms of exploring themes like transport or governance, much better works exist in the marketplace. Similarly to devise a detailed lecture from the book on a subject like architecture would be problematic unless it is given, as previously mentioned, to students of lesser historical knowledge. For higher-level classes the weaknesses in the book will become all too evident, but for tutorials with freshman students there is much to work from.

One might state that the adage "you get what you pay for" applies to *A Brief History*. Such an idiom though would downplay Paterson's work. While probably not likely to win an honorific award, praise should be heaped onto Michael Paterson for bringing a fresh interpretation to what is a complicated phase of British cultural history, and one all too often presented in a stuffy, highbrow manner that puts it out of reach of maturing intellectuals.

Chinese University of Hong Kong

Ian Morley

Ariela J. Gross. *What Blood Won't Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008. Pp. 368. Cloth, \$19.95; ISBN 978-0-674-03130-2.

In recent decades, biological and social scientists have rejected the notion of distinct human races. Rather, they assert, race was a creation of human culture, crafted to help manufacture, sustain, and justify socio-political and economic hierarchies. In *What Blood Won't Tell: A History of Race on Trial*, Ariela Gross, professor of history and law, uses race trials from the antebellum period to the present as a window into how

local communities of common white America shaped and reshaped our racial understandings through their legal systems in order to preserve their hierarchies.

Gross argues persuasively that, throughout history, the law relied more heavily upon white people's shifting "common sense" understandings of what determined a person's race, such as racial/cultural "performance," than upon any clear evidence of lineage or skin color. She also traces these malleable understandings through several stages, as changing times inspired shifts in race-defining strategies.

For example, antebellum America focused on the black/white dichotomy, where performing citizenship rights like voting, mustering in the militia, and jury duty served as proofs of whiteness. When blacks received citizenship after the Civil War, white Americans created separationist strategies to argue (ahistorically) that real whites had never associated socially with blacks. Whiteness relied suddenly upon illustrating one's lack of interactions with blacks. During this Jim Crow era, the law also transformed Indians and Hawaiians from nations to races, supposedly measurable by blood quantum (which few courts could determine precisely), and whether they had mixed with "Negroes" or "Mongolians." As immigration then rose from Asia, Mexico, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East—and racial science began recognizing several "color races" like white, black, red, yellow, and brown—those deemed most different from whites, and most like "Negroes" in their perceived inability to become like whites, were often also segregated and disfranchised, whether through *de facto* or *de jure* methods. Mexicans, while deemed legally white after 1940, remained largely segregated by reason of their assumed cultural differences and educational abilities rather than officially by race. This "cultural racism" became a preferred means for justifying and sustaining racial hierarchies when whites could no longer legally use race as the reason. Each of these evolving strategies also deterred interracial class-based alliances by encouraging groups to better their positions through distancing themselves from blacks while seeking as much whiteness as the law might allow. Blacks became the foil against which other struggling people of color and poor whites sought improved status from the courts.

One of this book's many strengths for teachers is Gross's attention to how each of these strategies still pulses through present battles over race and the racial hierarchies that remain. Her conclusion argues against both color-blindness and identity politics as ways to resolve problems stemming from this race-based past—thoughts sure to fuel dynamic class discussion. Gross's sweeping, engaging, and highly-detailed account is a must-read for history teachers seeking to enhance their own knowledge, sharpen lectures, or craft case studies for students' exploration of race. While it is too advanced for most undergraduates, graduate students specializing in race also will find its superb research, broad context, comparisons, and details invaluable.

Boise State University

Jill K. Gill

Ernest Freeberg. *Democracy's Prisoner: Eugene V. Debs, the Great War, and the Right to Dissent*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008. Pp. 380. Cloth, \$29.95; ISBN 10: 978-0-02792-3.

Any citizen, student, or teacher seeking to make sense of the post 9/11 world would do well to consult this volume on the imprisonment of perennial Socialist Party Presidential candidate Eugene V. Debs for his dissent to American participation in the First World War. Relying upon extensive archival research and an exhaustive reading of early twentieth-century periodicals, Ernest Freeberg, Associate Professor of History at the University of Tennessee, constructs a well-written narrative of efforts on behalf of civil libertarians and free speech advocates to obtain the release of Debs and other political prisoners.

Parallels with the political climate following 9/11 are evident in American insecurities manifested during the First World War. Concerned that antiwar activists were hindering the government's conscription program, Congress enacted the Espionage Act in June 1917, making speech that could be construed as interfering with U.S. military operations a federal crime punishable by a \$10,000 fine and twenty-year prison term. On 16 June 1918, Debs spoke in Canton, Ohio, criticizing suppression of dissent for a war that he believed benefitted business and capitalism at the expense of the working class. The result was the arrest of Debs for violating the Espionage Act which the Socialist leader perceived as an abridgement of his First Amendment rights. An Ohio jury, however, disagreed, and the frail, sixty-two year old Debs was sentenced to three concurrent ten-year terms for a speech interpreted as intending to obstruct military recruitment. The Supreme Court upheld the conviction, arguing in a unanimous decision that Debs's Canton speech was not protected as it demonstrated "a bad tendency." The court ruled that the majority's right to protection during wartime trumped an individual's free speech rights.

Thus, the conviction of Debs must be placed within the historical context of World War I patriotism and concerns about the Bolshevik Revolution. Fears of German espionage were quickly replaced by anxiety over communism as the postwar period was marked by racial, political, and labor unrest. The ensuing Red Scare was characterized by raids under the authorization of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer. Anarchists, socialists, communists, and members of the Industrial Workers of the World were incarcerated in a mass violation of First Amendment rights. But the focus of the Freeberg book is not the assaults upon political discontent, but rather the campaign for civil liberties, crystallizing around the case of Debs, which government suppression of dissent fostered in the post-World War One period and early 1920s.

Due to the overcrowding of federal prisons, Debs was initially dispatched to West Virginia's state penitentiary in Moundsville before being transferred to the federal facility in Atlanta. Although in poor health, Debs refused to request a pardon, maintaining that at Canton he was only exercising his Constitutional prerogatives. Liberals assumed that Debs and other dissidents would be released by President

Woodrow Wilson following the cessation of hostilities in Europe. A disillusioned Wilson, however, remained critical of Debs's loyalty, asserting that freeing the radical would be an affront to the brave young men who sacrificed their lives in the Wilsonian crusade to "make the world safe for democracy." As Wilson turned a deaf ear to pleas that Debs be released, the Socialist Party nominated convict number 9653 as their Presidential candidate for the fourth time. Running his 1920 campaign from a prison cell, Debs captured almost a million votes, although Freeberg attributes much of this support to a symbolic protest against the suppression of free speech by the Wilson administration rather than an endorsement of Socialist principles.

The election of conservative Republican Warren G. Harding, who had promised to restore "normalcy" to the nation, seemingly offered a more favorable environment for the release of wartime dissenters. While communists and socialists continued to wage doctrinal disputes through a protest campaign to free Debs, Freeberg argues that the most effective advocate for the Socialist leader was Lucy Robbins who formed the League for the Amnesty of Political Prisoners and forged alliances with the American Civil Liberties Union and the American Federal of Labor (AFL). The tireless lobbying of Robbins finally culminated in the decision by Harding to commute Debs's sentence, effective 25 December 1921.

Following his release from prison, Debs continued to labor for the freedom of all wartime dissenters whose sentences were finally commuted by Calvin Coolidge in December 1923. Robbins was disappointed that Debs was unable to reconcile with AFL president Samuel Gompers, with whom Debs originally clashed in the 1894 Pullman strike. Instead, Debs devoted his remaining years to a futile effort to revive the fortunes of the Socialist Party which never recovered from government suppression during World War I.

But for Freeberg the story of *Democracy's Prisoner* is less about Debs and socialism than the forging of a civil liberties movement in the United States. Freeberg concludes, "From the congressional debate over the Espionage Act to the final push for amnesty, radical and civil libertarians engaged a national audience in ideas that they had been working out for decades—about the role of free speech in the fight for social justice, the value of dissent as an instrument of progress, and the danger to democracy when the wealthy and powerful control the channels of communication."

Although he does not belabor the point, there are certainly powerful parallels between Freeberg's history of the campaign to free Debs and contemporary concerns regarding the Patriot Act, policies of interrogation and torture, and the state of civil liberties in an era of perpetual war. In addition, Freeberg makes a contribution to contemporary political discourse with his account of a Socialist Party leader who was revered by many Americans. Perhaps socialism is not quite as un-American as some commentators and politicians would have us believe. Freeberg's *Democracy's Prisoner*

is a timely narrative history accessible to the general reader. It should serve as a valuable supplementary text for the history classroom at both the collegiate and secondary levels.

Sandia Preparatory School, Albuquerque, NM

Ron Briley

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. And Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, eds. *Harlem Renaissance Lives: From the African American National Biography*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. Pp. 608. Cloth, \$37.34; ISBN 13: 978-0195387957.

With hundreds of accessible entries on the lives of African Americans directly or indirectly associated with this period, *Harlem Renaissance Lives* is an ambitious effort to highlight, and sometimes uncover, the role of African Americans in shaping the United States in the twentieth century. While the entries are brief, the book's strength is its breadth with portraits of not only writers, artists, actors, and musicians but also educators, civil rights and labor activists, entrepreneurs, athletes, clergy, and aviators. Students of history will find familiar figures of the period such as Langston Hughes, Josephine Baker, Duke Ellington, Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. However, the real value of the work is in highlighting, however briefly, the lives of hundreds of lesser-known African Americans. Some figures, such as educator Roscoe Bruce, the son of a U.S. Senator, grew up relatively privileged, but many of the biographies involve African-Americans whose unlikely contributions begin with a background that included slavery and sharecropping. Regardless, each entry includes a valuable bibliography and information about relevant primary sources such as an obituary and archival collections.

Although Harlem, as the "Mecca of the New Negro," provides a common thread to the varied biographical portraits, most of the individuals began their lives far from New York. These stories often originate in small towns throughout the South and Midwest and other portraits begin in the Caribbean, Europe, Egypt, and Canada. Thus the biographies, especially taken as a whole, illuminate the history of race, migration, and urbanization in twentieth-century America. The lives of individuals reveal the contours of race and culture within a modernizing American society. For example, Charles Chestnutt, born in Ohio in 1858, forged a career as a writer based in part on his experience with his family's multiracial roots in North Carolina before and after the Civil War. Elsewhere, Laura Bowman, a biracial actress born in Quincy, Illinois, in 1881, struggled to find professional success despite the racism prevalent in American theater and film. Many others found the cultural and intellectual milieu of Harlem a fertile ground for individual growth that eventually spoke to the condition of African Americans throughout the nation.

Unfortunately, the success of *Harlem Renaissance Lives* in illustrating the experiences of individuals is also the book's central weakness. The introduction is less

than four pages and, in contrast to other reference books such as the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, the collection fails to include any thematic chapters that could assist readers in making meaningful connections between the biographies and the broad context of American history. Students of history would benefit from entries on such subjects as the Great Migration, the "New Negro," jazz, literature, and industrialization. A focus on individuals leaves little room for important organizations such as the NAACP and the National Urban League or significant historical forces such as black nationalism, the New Deal, and suburbanization. Teachers and students will have to look elsewhere to find ways to use these valuable portraits of individuals to ultimately enrich the larger historical narrative of the United States.

Illinois State University

Richard L. Hughes

Troy Jackson. *Becoming King: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Making of a National Leader.* Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008. Pp. 272. Cloth, \$35.00p ISBN 978-0-8131-2520-6.

Much has been written about the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-56 and of the life and times of Martin Luther King, Jr. Yet Troy Jackson's fine book offers some fresh perspectives on both Montgomery and the impact it had on King's subsequent leadership in the civil rights struggles of the 1960s. Jackson brings to his story of King and Montgomery credentials both as a professional historian and a clergyman. At the present, he is senior pastor at University Christian Church in Cincinnati. The basic theme of *Becoming King* is that racial and social conditions existing in Montgomery at the time of Rosa Parks's famous arrest in December 1955 played a crucial role in shaping King's social and religious philosophy of racial justice after 1960, thus helping define his leadership of the national civil rights movement until his death in 1968.

Jackson believes that too little attention has been given to understanding how diverse class and social circumstances within Montgomery's black community influenced the direction of the bus boycott and King's role in it. The movement involved King with long time black social activists like Rosa Parks, E.D. Nixon, Jo Ann Robinson, Rufus Lewis, and his controversial predecessor at Dexter Avenue Baptist, Vernon Johns. Leadership of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) also brought him into contact with the few courageous whites of Montgomery, women such as Virginia Durr, Juliette Morgan, Olive Andrews, Clara Rutledge, as well as Robert Graetz, who was pastor of an African American church. The author gives considerable attention to the difficulties created by Montgomery's white establishment during the boycott and the increased presence of racist organizations such as the White Citizens Council and Ku Klux Klan.

But it is in his analysis of the historic tensions within the African American community, among black working and professional classes, black churches, and certain

conflicting economic, political, and social priorities, that allows us to perceive the manner in which King's leadership was as much shaped by the people he led as it was by his own beliefs and tactics. The author's involvement with the Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project at Stanford University gave him a special opportunity to explore in depth King's earliest religious writings and sermons prior to 1955 and contrast them with his Montgomery experience and the 1960s.

Jackson concludes by describing the manner in which the three years following the successes of the bus boycott made King into a national figure and eventually drew him away from his ministry at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church and the MIA. Having gained national attention as the most celebrated civil rights figure, King moved to the leadership of the national Southern Christian Leadership Conference based in Atlanta. Jackson notes that despite the successes of the MIA, even before King left, the organization was in decline and racial conditions, especially for many black working-classes, remained difficult. Violence toward blacks in Montgomery did not cease with the end of racial segregation of the buses. "In the final analysis," Jackson notes, "the bus boycott did more for King and the emerging national civil rights movement than it did for the broader African American community in Montgomery."

Becoming King would be a wonderful addition for advanced high school and college students involved in history, religion, sociology, or any number of fields concerned with the study of racial issues and social movements. The bibliographical references, both primary and secondary, along with the author's extensive reference notes and Clayborne Carson's introduction, are alone worth the purchase of the book. Jackson writes with clarity, and the themes he explores offer a thoughtful basis for debate and discussion not only about King and the civil rights era but the complexities and challenges of social change in our society.

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