



# Teaching History

A Journal of Methods

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**TEACHING HISTORY**  
**A JOURNAL OF METHODS**

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## RACE, MUSIC, AND A MEANINGFUL APPROACH TO TEACHING HISTORICAL METHODS

Richard Hughes  
Illinois State University

Oliver Sacks, a neurosurgeon in New York City and the well-known author of *Awakenings*, recently described the case of a forty-two year old man named Tony Cicoria who was struck by lightning. After almost dying at a nearby hospital, Cicoria appeared to recover fully within weeks, only to discover that, for the first time in his life, he had what Sacks referred to as an “insatiable desire to listen to piano music.” The individual had no formal musical training and yet within months he began teaching himself how to play the piano and eventually began composing complex, original works. In his book *Musicophilia*, Sacks describes other patients, many quite elderly, who discovered that music long forgotten from childhood had the ability to induce seizures. Such cases suggested to Sacks the powerful, in his words, “engraving of music on the brain.” The man struck by lightning was a dramatic example of how humans are inescapably a “musical species.”<sup>1</sup>

While Sacks explored the “extraordinary tenacity of music memory” or the role of music in shaping the cognitive map of individuals, my interest as a historian lies in the power of music in illuminating what Abraham Lincoln referred to as our “mystic chords of memory.” Speaking at his first Inaugural Address in March 1861, Lincoln used the metaphor of music to remind an increasingly divided nation that the “chorus of the Union,” his term for collective memory, lay embedded not in Americans’ neurology but rather in “every living heart.” As a result, when I agreed to teach a required historical methods course with a rather dry catalog description—“An introduction to the discipline, including study of research and writing techniques, historical methods, and the nature and varieties of history”—I chose to use music as the focus. I entitled my section “Doing History: Race and American Music” and aimed to ground the course on methodology in what I hoped would be the meaningful historical context of African-American history and music.<sup>2</sup>

I am not a musician nor do I have any formal training in musicology. I am an historian who grew up in Austin, Texas, the self-proclaimed “Live Music Capital of the World,” and really enjoys music. More importantly, I have always found music to be a portal to the past, a fleeting opportunity to travel back to what British novelist L.P.

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<sup>1</sup>Oliver Sacks, *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain* (New York: Knopf Publishing, 2007), 5, 47.

<sup>2</sup>Sacks, xi; Abraham Lincoln’s First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1861, [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov).

Hartley referred to as a "foreign country."<sup>3</sup> For me, it is impossible to separate my attraction to much of American music from my similar interest in many topics in American history. A colleague of mine once confessed to me that his love for European history stemmed from a young infatuation with Nazi Germany. The rich legacy of American music seems like a much more entertaining portal than the "Hitler Channel" on cable television. My students seem to agree: My approach to music as both a fan and as an historian resonates with my students, who often lack formal training but nevertheless find themselves thinking about music as some sort of soundtrack for their generation.<sup>4</sup>

For years I have used music to teach topics in American history. I provide students with lyrics, I play music in the classroom, and I sometimes use Bob Dylan's song, "The Times They Are a-Changing'," as the basis for a cumulative essay question for an upper-division course on American history since 1945. Sometimes the evolution of the popular music industry itself has served as valuable historical evidence. My students and I have discussed the important shift from pop 45 singles to concept albums as a metaphor for the evolution of baby boomers during the turbulent sixties. Historians and others have long looked to music for a window into the past. The cover photograph and article about legendary jazz singer Nina Simone in a recent *Journal of American History* is just one example. Resources for using music to teach American history have grown in the last decade, notably with an entire issue of the *OAH Magazine of History* in 2005 dedicated to the topic.<sup>5</sup>

However, this course was somewhat different in that I proposed to use music not just to illustrate an historical topic but rather to teach historical analysis and research methods. This involved combining many of the elements found in history methods courses with readings and assignments specific to the topic of music and race. First, I assigned several chapters from textbooks that have become standards of history methods courses: James Davidson and Mark Lytle's *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection* and Conal Furry and Michael J. Salevouris's *The Methods and*

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<sup>3</sup>The phrase "The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there" comes from L.P. Hartley's novel, *The Go-Between* (New York: Knopf Publishing, 1954), 1. For a historian's take on the phrase, see David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>4</sup>For more on an historian's approach to music, see Lawrence Levine's "Musical Odyssey on an American Historian," in Jeffrey Jackson and Stanley C. Pelkey, eds., *Music and History: Bridging the Disciplines* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005).

<sup>5</sup>Ruth Feldstein, "'I Don't Trust You Anymore': Nina Simone, Culture, and Black Activism in the 1960s," *Journal of American History*, 91:4 (March 2005), 1349-79; "Teaching History with Music," *OAH Magazine of History*, 19:4 (July 2005). For an example of a seminal work on African-American history, culture, and music, see Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

*Skills of History*.<sup>6</sup> In addition to these surveys of methodological issues, I assigned James Madison's *A Lynching in the Heartland: Race and Memory in America* to provide a historian's approach to the history of race, the phenomenon of lynching, and the role of memory.<sup>7</sup> Madison's work, which is especially useful to students from the Midwest—the story is based in Marion, Indiana, in 1930—provides a foundation from which students then read a journalist's approach to music and lynching: David Margolick's "*Strange Fruit: Biography of a Song*."<sup>8</sup> While Madison's work illustrates a fairly traditional approach to an historical event, his interest in the power of a single photograph and the continual reinterpretation of an historical event since the 1930s raises important questions for students learning about the discipline of history. In contrast, Margolick's focus is on the history of a song, specifically the origins and impact of Billie Holiday's legendary anti-lynching song "Strange Fruit." Margolick and others attribute the song's lyrics, written in 1938 by Abel Meeropol, to the lynching photograph earlier in the decade that figures so prominently in Madison's book. Long before the image captivated historians, the photograph was initially the focus of journalists and Americans who viewed it in newspapers or purchased the horrific photo on postcards.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Margolick is a journalist and his portrait of "Strange Fruit" lacks the historical context, analysis, and documentation typically found in scholarship by historians.<sup>10</sup> This comparison between the two works is an important ingredient in the course not only because it illuminates central features of the historical discipline, but also because the course's major assignment asked students, as historians, to produce a research paper that combined the best of both Madison's *A Lynching in the Heartland* and Margolick's "*Strange Fruit*." Modeling this approach to both history and music became easier after I initially taught the course when I found historian Scott Nelson's book, "*Steel Drivin' Man*"—*John Henry: The Untold Story of an American Legend* in

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<sup>6</sup>James W. Davidson and Mark H. Lytle, *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2005); Conal Furay and Michael J. Salevouris, *The Methods and Skills of History: A Practical Guide*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Whelling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2000).

<sup>7</sup>James Madison, *A Lynching in the Heartland: Race and Memory in America* (New York: Pelgrave, 2001).

<sup>8</sup>David Margolick, "*Strange Fruit: Biography of a Song*" (New York: Harper Collins, 2001).

<sup>9</sup>For the photograph, see an online collection of lynching photographs: <http://withoutsanctuary.org/>

<sup>10</sup>For more on "Strange Fruit," see *Strange Fruit* [videorecording], presented by Independent Television Service, produced, directed, and edited by Joel Katz (San Francisco: California Newsreel, 2002).

2007.<sup>11</sup> I now use chapter two of the book in which Nelson consciously reflects on the historical detective work necessary to explore the origins of the popular song amid the labor history of the South.

The course combines the rather traditional topics of history methods outlined in the two textbooks with the historical analysis of race and music via a required research project on a song in American history. Building on our analysis of "Strange Fruit" in the context of both the history of American jazz and African-American history, we were now ready to apply the combined approaches of Madison and Margolick to other songs. Early in the semester, I provided each student with a list of possible songs (title and composer/singer) and students participated in a random drawing for their song. After a week to trade songs if desired, the students began completing an analysis guide with over thirty research questions organized into six categories:

- A. Basic Information on the Song
- B. Historical Context of the Song
- C. The Audience: The Consumption of Popular Culture
- D. Musical Context
- E. Historical Analysis
- F. Historical Interpretation

After identifying the important individuals associated with the song in Category A, students faced questions in Category B that encouraged them to place their song within the larger historical context of American history, especially the history of race. I asked students to think back to the secondary sources that informed their U.S. survey courses and to situate their piece of music within that larger narrative. Category C included questions about the song's intended audience and how it might have been consumed by Americans at the time. Category D involved questions about how the song relates to the broader history of American music over the last two centuries that I mapped out for them in lectures. I also assigned an online chapter from the *Grove Dictionary of Music* and placed an excellent history of American music by Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman, entitled *American Popular Music: From Minstrelsy to MTV* (2003), on reserve in the library.<sup>12</sup> Questions under Category E, "Historical Analysis," dealt with the song as a valuable primary source. Examples included questions about the lyrics as text and how the analytical tools of race, class, and gender might inform a historian's approach to the song. The last category included questions that encouraged students to reflect on their role as historians in relation to the song. For example, "What inferences did you make when first analyzing the song as an historical document?"

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<sup>11</sup>Scott R. Nelson, "Steel Drivin' Man"—*John Henry and the Untold Story of an American Legend* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 21-40.

<sup>12</sup>Grove Music Online, <http://www.grovemusic.com>; Starr, Larry and Christopher Waterman, *American Popular Music: From Minstrelsy to MTV* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). A number of textbooks are available on music history, but most focus on classical music from Western Europe.



In an attempt to connect the important work on historical methodology to my students' analyses of the songs, I also included questions in the analysis guide directly tied to specific chapters in *After the Fact* and *The Methods and Skills of History*. As students read assigned chapters in these books, they answered questions in the guide related to their song as well. My aim was to cover the central issues of historical methods while asking students to apply these issues to their individual research project. Examples included:

1. In Furay and Salevouris (Chapter 4), the authors provide some basic "starter" questions to ask when analyzing an historical situation:
  - A. What was the role of political, theological, scientific, or social ideas in contributing to your source?
  - B. What was the role of economic or technological factors?
  - C. What was the role of organized groups?
  - D. What was the role of certain individuals?
  - E. What was the role of long-standing legal, customary, and diplomatic conditions?
  - F. What was the role of contingency?

\*Answer the above questions for your song in American history.

2. Furay and Salevouris discuss the role of bias in historical sources and interpretations in Chapter 4. How might bias influence an analysis of your specific primary source?
3. Furay and Salevouris discuss the importance of avoiding presentism or judging the past using the values and beliefs of the present in Chapter 5. Provide an example of a possible presentist interpretation of your source.
4. How might your analysis of your primary source relate to some of the ideas presented in Davidson's *After the Fact*? Select **one** of the following quotes from your assigned readings in Davidson and explain its possible relationship to your analysis.
  - A. "The reconstruction of an event is clearly different from the event itself." (p. 1)
  - B. "A keen mind working on an apparently small topic may uncover relationships and connections whose significance goes beyond the subject matter's original boundaries." (p. 24)
  - C. "It seems only logical that historians should bring to bear the tools of modern psychology to assess the man's personality." (p. 160)
  - D. "Yet no matter how 'artless' the photographs of Jacob Riis may be in terms of their aesthetic control of the medium, to assume they are bias-free seriously underestimates their interpretive content." (p. 217)
  - E. "If that conclusion is correct, it suggests that neither the reflective hypothesis nor the manipulative hypothesis explains how the mass media affect history." (p. 369)

I chose music ranging from songs of the antebellum period to hip hop in the early years of the Reagan Administration. While I initially and naively feared not being able to find enough songs appropriate for the assignment, I soon realized that, despite teaching the course a few times, the real challenge was making choices from so many interesting options. There are a remarkable number of songs associated with my course topic and I plan to create other versions of the course with labor songs or music centered on social protest. With a few exceptions from the history of jazz, I restricted my choices to songs with lyrics to encourage students to approach the lyrics with the same critical analysis an historian would use to tackle another text such as a diary entry, a famous speech, or a legal document. Students researched their song as a primary source and wrote a ten to twelve-page paper that placed that source within the larger historical context and historiography of both American music and race in the United States. In addition, I required each student to create a fifteen-minute oral presentation that included a PowerPoint slide show, an audio clip, and their analysis of their song. Some of the more effective songs I have assigned include:

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|--|--|
| 1. Follow the Drinking Gourd—slave song    | 12. Which Side Are You On?—SNCC Singers                |
| 2. Steal Away—Fisk Jubilee Singers         | 13. Woke Up This Morning—SNCC Singers                  |
| 3. Old Folks at Home—Stephen Foster        | 14. Think—Aretha Franklin                              |
| 4. John Brown's Body—Julia Ward Howe       | 15. Say It Loud—I'm Black & I'm Proud—James Brown      |
| 5. Tiger Rag—Original Dixieland Jazz Band  | 16. Society's Child—Janis Ian                          |
| 6. Black and Tan Fantasy—Duke Ellington    | 17. Southern Man—Neil Young                            |
| 7. St. Louis Blues—Bessie Smith            | 18. Whitey on the Moon—Gil Scott-Heron                 |
| 8. Old Man River—Paul Robeson              | 19. The Message—Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five |
| 9. We Shall Overcome—Pete Seeger           | 20. Fight the Power—Public Enemy                       |
| 10. That's Alright—Elvis Presley           |  |
| 11. Shake, Rattle, and Roll—Big Joe Turner |  |

Now that I have taught the course a few times and had a chance to talk with students about the approach, I believe the infusion of meaningful historical content in the form of music and the issue of race has some significant advantages. First, despite the fact that the new social history is hardly new, most of our majors come to college with a relatively traditional political narrative about American history. Songs from African Americans struggling to create art within a society often wedded to an oppressive racial hierarchy contribute to all our efforts to bring multiple voices into the classroom and, over the course of the semester, collectively create a powerful historical counter-narrative. Our class discussions ranged from the colonial period through the twentieth century and the fact that we rarely mentioned political decisions emanating from the nation's capital was a powerful testimony to the ability of social history to revolutionize our students' sense of the past. I always include at least one slave spiritual and many of the songs deal, at least indirectly, with issues such as labor, social class, gender, religion, migration, and daily life.

Second, placing songs as cultural and historical artifacts at the center of research projects introduces students to another field often overlooked in secondary schools—cultural history. Students find in music an accessible path to generate questions about authorial intent, cultural hierarchies, assimilation and resistance, folklore, and the consumption of popular culture amid a growing system of market capitalism. Used to thinking about power solely in terms of electoral politics and wealth, students exploring the production and consumption of songs often written and performed by marginalized Americans found themselves rethinking issues of power. I utilized songs by Stephen Foster, the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, and Elvis Presley to direct students to research the ways white composers, musicians, singers, and fans appropriated black cultures and, in turn, reconfigured white identity and American popular culture. Although Michel Foucault and other theorists comprised only a fraction of the course, topics such as the impact of minstrel music, jazz, R&B, or hip hop on the dominant white culture and identity since the nineteenth century inevitably encourage students to question their notion of hegemony within American society. As one student explained, researching music “led me to analyze and think critically about situations that I would usually see as ‘life’ and it being the ways things are.”<sup>13</sup>

Third, as someone interested in American social history during the twentieth century, I have found music particularly useful in illuminating for students what historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall has recently identified as the “long civil rights movement.”<sup>14</sup> The dominant narrative of the civil rights movement emphasizes the challenges to racial segregation in the South between 1954 and 1965 and, unfortunately, divorces civil rights from labor activism and other issues such as gender. This emphasis on the “classical phase” of the movement obscures these issues outside the South and includes what Hall refers to as a “narrative breach” between a limited, popular notion of the movement and the efforts of Americans to resist racism and economic exploitation in recent decades. In contrast, the “long civil rights movement” places the developments between *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 within the broader context of American labor history, political radicalism, New Deal reform, modern feminism, and conservatism during the Cold War and beyond.<sup>15</sup>

Our students are too often impoverished by the convenient periodization of course catalogs and textbook chapters and music can help address this collective amnesia. Songs such as Billie Holiday’s “Strange Fruit” reveal the connections over

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<sup>13</sup>Written comments from students in History 200, Fall 2006 and Spring 2007, in author’s possession.

<sup>14</sup>Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *Journal of American History*, 91:4 (March 2005), 1233-1263.

<sup>15</sup>Hall, 1236, 1251.

time and between social movements rarely found in historical narratives, conventional surveys, or public history. The fact that Abel Meeropol, a Jewish school teacher and a member of the Communist Party in New York City, wrote the lyrics for "Strange Fruit" years before more conventional stories of the civil rights movement begin with *Brown* helps students explore the role of the Old Left and labor issues in forming the long struggle for racial justice throughout the twentieth century. Even the hysteria of the Cold War, often tucked between discussions of the Great Depression and the civil rights movement, emerges from the analysis of "Strange Fruit" as Meeropol and his wife, key figures in the leftist community in New York, adopted the two children of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg after their arrest and execution for espionage in 1953, a year before the *Brown* case.<sup>16</sup>

Often songs performed by multiple singers over time have the greatest potential for understanding the complexity and relevance of the long civil rights movement. I assign white folk singer and labor activist Pete Seeger's version of "We Shall Overcome" from the 1940s to encourage students to trace the shared history of social activism associated with the labor movement and the civil rights movement. Seeger learned a version of the song with roots in both black churches and white labor activism and eventually taught his reinterpretation to young black activists who made it an anthem of the civil rights movement.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, I use the version of "Which Side Are You On?" performed by the SNCC Freedom Singers in the 1960s to provide the students with an opportunity to uncover the older and slightly different lyrics sung by striking coal miners in Kentucky during the Great Depression.<sup>18</sup> In all three cases, songs as key primary sources allow students as historians to excavate the enduring connections between the struggles for racial and economic justice that have become, according to historian Nancy MacLean, "airbrushed from popular memory." Ironically, the rich sounds of American music might be the most effective way for students and the general public to rediscover the "quieter struggles" to expand democracy throughout the twentieth century.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Margolick, 11.

<sup>17</sup>Pete Seeger, *Where Have All the Flowers Gone: A Singer's Stories, Songs, Seeds, Robberies* (Bethlehem, PA: Sing Out Publications, 1993), 32-35; Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1-25.

<sup>18</sup>Timothy P. Lynch, *Strike Songs of the Great Depression* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001).

<sup>19</sup>Nancy MacLean, *Freedom is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2006), 341, 345.

Of course, the value of any course in historical methods also lies in its ability to help students develop as historians. When I asked students at the end of the term whether one should use music to teach historical methods, one commented that his assigned song made him "look at an exact moment in history. It allowed me to get a feeling of people's thoughts and reaction to the song, thus helping me understand that particular moment in history." Another student echoed the perspectives of many in the class when he claimed that "researching the song was difficult and I had to broaden my horizons in the researching area, and go outside my comfort zone to get information about it. This led me to a greater understanding of the work of historians." Still another added that she "analyzed more than for any other paper" and "I now feel better about using my own interpretations for my work." Although no student claimed the course was as powerful as being struck by lightning, many claimed that the potent combination of music and history changed them as students. Historian Lawrence Levine once argued that to overlook music was to "ignore a vital part of ourselves, our history, and our culture."<sup>20</sup> As one history major declared, analyzing the past through a song "forces you to become consumed by the material but as a historian."<sup>21</sup>

Note: The author would like to thank Vanette Schwartz of ISU's Milner Library for her assistance over the years with the methods course.

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<sup>20</sup>Levine, "Musical Odyssey on an American Historian," 18.

<sup>21</sup>Written comments from students in History 200, Fall 2006 and Spring 2007, in author's possession.

**REFOCUSING ON READING:  
STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE READING AND ANALYTICAL SKILLS  
IN HISTORY COURSES**

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The digital age has changed American society, which means history instructors face a different reality in their classrooms. With their cell phones, blackberries, iPods, digital games, computers, and the Internet, Americans have an unprecedented number of digital distractions. Few people have time to read anymore. Meanwhile, the new diversions have not displaced the popularity of television. According to a study conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), Americans age 15 and older spend about half of their total daily leisure time watching TV, while “15- to 24-year-olds spend less than three percent of their daily leisure time reading, and 25 to 34-year-olds spend roughly four percent.” College students are no less affected, and arguably more so. They read less in their leisure time than did earlier generations, and consequently they read less proficiently. The National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) gave a reading comprehension test to 19,200 Americans, ages sixteen and above, and found that declines in “proficient” readers are steepest among the best-educated groups. Between 1992 and 2003, the study reported “a 20 percent rate of decline for adults with a graduate school experience and a 22 percent rate of decline for other college graduates.”<sup>1</sup>

So how should history instructors respond? The answers must be measured because modern means of instruction can enhance education. The narratives and visuals of documentaries can stimulate learning, and the Internet vastly increases access to information. However, these digital advances have a downside. The new media cannot replace the thoughtful reading of scholarly texts and their use unavoidably decreases the customary focus on reading assignments in history courses. To compensate for this shift, educators should make corrective adjustments. Such adjustments do not imply eschewing the Internet as a resource and educational tool, nor do they suggest avoiding the occasional use of documentaries. They simply require instructors to renew their efforts to teach traditional reading and analytical skills in our age of ever-changing technologies. This article presents strategies to foster such skills through “main-point” and “reflective-reading” assignments. It also assesses the value of active-reading instruction. I have designed and used these strategies and assignments in college-level history courses of roughly twenty to thirty students.

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<sup>1</sup>National Endowment for the Arts, *To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence* (Research Report #47, November 2007), 38, 63-65.

## The Challenge

Reading a primary historical text or the dense information in a textbook or other academic book has considerable instructional value, but many students have little idea of how to approach such work. Often they believe that finishing an assigned reading completes their task and thereafter judge that any lack of comprehension reflects the failings of the text, the instructor, or both. A few specific questions from the instructor frequently reveal that students cannot remember much of what they read. The problem lies with the students' passive mode of reading, which commonly results from expectations that the text should be engaging without much effort from the reader. Such expectations are misplaced. As those who have struggled with scholarly readings know, comprehending the content requires effort.

To prepare students to tackle difficult readings, instructors should state and restate the challenging nature of the texts, while at the same time explaining the significance of the texts' content. The importance of content is apparent to the instructor but is usually less evident to students. Finding a balance between explaining the importance of the readings and warning of their complexity is not easy; some students might become intimidated if the instructor overstates the challenge. On the other hand, allowing students to discover the difficulty of the texts for themselves typically leads to greater discouragement, while an early acceptance of the arduous but worthwhile task helps students embrace the challenge.

## Explaining "Active Reading"

The term "active reading" has varying definitions. Although some faculty might prefer equally functional terms such as "engaged reading," the term active reading contrasts clearly with the notion of passive reading. Since different reading techniques might prove more or less effective, depending on the individual, a prescribed regiment for active reading is less beneficial than a general idea. Nevertheless, most students need direction,<sup>2</sup> and thus instructors should strongly encourage students to practice one or more of the following active-reading techniques:

- 1) summarizing or noting the main points of the text's paragraphs, sections, or chapters;
- 2) writing out any questions, concerns, or comments about the content;
- 3) questioning the author's premises; or
- 4) outlining chapters or sections.

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<sup>2</sup>One noted five-step reading strategy worth mentioning to students is the Survey, Question, Read, Recite and Review method, commonly known by its acronym SQ3R. See Francis Pleasant Robinson, *Effective Study*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 15-50.

In short, active reading means finding a way or a variety of ways to engage with the text, and some of the most useful active-reading techniques consist of the reading activities mentioned above. Although these techniques are not novel, their application frequently suffers due to a lack of explicit explanation, emphasis, and encouragement.

To help students hone reading skills, instructors should assign exercises that demand active reading at the beginning of the course. Assignments that encourage active reading vary widely, and instructors might want to experiment to find those that work best for them and their students. One effective assignment asks students to distill the main points of course readings. Two versions of this assignment—one designed for textbook readings and the other for analyzing primary documents—are illustrated below.

#### **A “Main-Points” Assignment for a Textbook**

Designed to use and reinforce a common active-reading technique, this assignment requires students to determine the main points of a section in a chapter of a textbook and then to present the main points to the class for discussion. Through discussion, the presenter, instructor, and class reach a consensus regarding the main points. They might also examine and debate other topics of interest in the section, at the discretion of the instructor.

To start, the instructor assigns each student a different section in the chapter. Sometimes this will require assigning two or more chapters, depending on the number of sections and the number of students. The instructions for this assignment are then explained in three steps, a sample of which is provided below:

**Step One:** Carefully read chapters 1-2 and be prepared to discuss the material in class. Then read with particular care the section the instructor assigned to you and determine the main points of that section. There should be three to eight main points, depending on the section, and the points should be written in complete sentences. Students must complete their list of main points by [\*date one\*] for sections in chapter one and by [\*date two\*] for sections in chapter two. Step Two (below) will be impossible to accomplish if the student is absent or if the assignment is not finished on time. In such cases, assignments can earn only half credit upon being e-mailed to the instructor.

**Step Two:** Students present their main points to the class and explain why the points are the most essential ones that the authors want to convey in the section. With the instructor’s guidance, the class will then discuss the section and reach a consensus as to the main points. Students should not be offended if their main points differ from those of the class. Instead, the presenter needs to note carefully the class’s concluding main points. The



presentation of the main points should last no longer than five minutes, although subsequent discussion may last longer, at the instructor's discretion.

**Step Three:** The purpose of Step Three is to generate a written, digital copy of the main points. Presenters shall compose the main points of their assigned section as determined through class discussion (the consensus). They are then required to e-mail as an attachment those main points to the instructor at [\*instructor's e-mail address\*] by [\*date\*]. The instructor records the final grade for the assignment only after receiving this e-mail from the student. To ensure their opportunity for a good grade, students should check their grammar and spelling for errors. Students are also encouraged to meet briefly with the instructor after class if they would like further guidance.

After students submit the main-point assignments, the instructor has the option of copying and pasting all of the main points into a master main-points study list. The instructor then can post the list on a course website and/or distribute it as a hard copy. The list, in turn, can serve as a helpful study guide.<sup>3</sup>

As useful as this main-points assignment is in introducing active-reading skills to students, this tool should not be overused, especially for textbook reading. After all, a likely reason many students practice poor active-reading techniques is because educators—under their own pressures—have spoon-fed instructional material to them. The main-points assignment demonstrates an active-reading technique, but it should not replace the requirement that students carefully read the entire assigned text. Students should understand that they are responsible for practicing active-reading techniques on their own. If needed, the instructor might find it useful to refer back to the main-points technique when reinforcing active reading. The question, “What are the main points?” demands an accountable active-reading process. It also provides a starting point for discussion, even if the students are having difficulty with comprehension.

### A “Main-Points” Assignment for Primary Documents

Having students read primary documents regularly, or even basing an entire course on primary documents, has advantages. Reading primary documents enhances students' analytical skills by requiring them to interpret for themselves the raw materials of history, as opposed to relying on the filtered analysis of secondary works. Determining the main points of a primary document compels students to address the

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<sup>3</sup>For an example of such a study guide for my course on Colonial Latin America, see <http://www.tamut.edu/academics/mperri/ColAm/ColLAAM.htm>.

author's reasons for writing the document, and this, in turn, leads students to examine the historical context. This additional work makes the main-points assignment for primary documents—unlike that for textbooks—beneficial to use regularly since it gives students a framework in which to analyze a document and place it in context. The purpose of the assignment is to expose students to documents and ideas, but for many students it does more than just expose and inform. The assignment helps students understand that the study of the past is as much a process of interpretation as a quest for facts.

The basic format of the main-points assignment for primary documents largely replicates the assignment for textbooks: Students determine the main points of their assigned reading, which is then discussed in class, followed by the presenter recording the main points as determined by class consensus. Additional tasks include placing the document into historical context and addressing the document's significance. For an American history course, the guidelines below provide students with direction on how to approach this assignment.

● **Historical Context:** Placing the document into historical context involves answering the following questions:

- What is the author's background? For example, what is the author's race, class, educational experience, religion? Where was he or she reared? What transforming events occurred in the author's life?
- What are his or her viewpoints concerning the major issues of the time?
- What can be said about the author's time? In other words, what are the major issues and events concerning the author and affecting society at the time the document is being conceived and written?
- Who is the intended audience?

● **Main Points:** Students should ask the following questions to understand the document's main points:

- Why was the document written? In other words, what points did the author most want to convey?
  - This requires students to distill the essential points of the document. The points should be written as complete sentences. In most cases, the main point should not be a quotation, but rather a concise statement in the student's own words. However, students are encouraged to support the main points with appropriate quotations, usually inserted directly underneath the relevant main point.

● **Historical Significance:** Students should address the following questions when determining and evaluating the document's historical significance:

- What impact did the document have on the author's society?
- What impact did it have on later generations?

- What groups in particular did the document impact?
- Was this impact important and, if so, why?

### Researching a Document's Historical Context

Placing a primary work in context and determining its significance usually requires some research using secondary sources. However, the assignment is not a research paper. Its central goal is to develop analytical skills through careful examination of the assigned document. Therefore, the instructor should keep contextual research simple. One practical solution is to assign a textbook to help students place the document in context

Educators should not ignore the Internet. Although the Internet contains a good deal of misinformation, certain websites can be valuable and convenient sources of information to help place a document in context. If instructors want to direct students to information, they could provide a list of recommended websites. On the other hand, a less managed approach also has advantages. Providing students with general guidelines to search on their own for information on the Internet is a constructive method to teach the merit of scholarship and the critical assessment of sources. The instructor should explain why peer-reviewed sources are usually more credible, as well as to point out the pitfalls inherent in Wikipedia's open editing process. Below is a sample guide instructors can use to help students navigate Internet sources.

Students should not entirely trust everything they find on the Internet, because many websites contain inaccurate information. Instead, students should practice their critical-thinking skills when reading materials found on the Internet—or anywhere for that matter. This entails noting, and perhaps investigating, the source of information found on a website, as well as corroborating the information with information found in your textbook, in other books or articles, or on other websites. In short, be cautious and skeptical in your search for information. The instructor and your fellow students have the right to question the validity of information discussed in class and to request the source of the information.

### Choosing a Reader of Primary Texts

Many publishers of history textbooks offer accompanying source readers, and the Internet teems with websites that provide access to many important documents in history, especially American history. For example, the Library of Congress maintains a superb website at <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/PrimDocsHome.html>. Prentice Hall publishes a popular primary-source reader entitled *American Issues*,

edited by Irwin Unger and Robert R. Tomes.<sup>4</sup> Other major publishers of college texts also have excellent primary-source readers.<sup>5</sup> The best option is for instructors to create their own customized reader. Although this can be time-consuming, several publishers offer convenient on-line databases where instructors can create a customized reader on the Internet and then have a bookstore order hard copies of it for students to purchase.

Publisher	Database Title	Database Web Site
Cengage Learning	<i>Documenting America's Past</i>	<a href="http://www.textchoice.com/cgi-bin/WebObjects/TC.woa/wo/1.0.49.1.3..9.1.0.1.1.1">http://www.textchoice.com/cgi-bin/WebObjects/TC.woa/wo/1.0.49.1.3..9.1.0.1.1.1</a>
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Co. <sup>6</sup>	<i>Custom Courseware</i> , formerly known as <i>Bibliobase</i>	<a href="http://websrv04.comcom.com:8102/HMCO/LoginPage.jsp">http://websrv04.comcom.com:8102/HMCO/LoginPage.jsp</a>
Pearson Custom Publishing	<i>Retrieving the American Past</i>	<a href="http://www.pearsoncustom.com/database/rtap.html">http://www.pearsoncustom.com/database/rtap.html</a>
McGraw-Hill Companies	<i>Primis Online</i>	<a href="http://www.primisonline.com">http://www.primisonline.com</a>

Most of the databases charge a certain amount per page, and usually customized readers are less expensive than edited ones with a similar number of pages. The editors of the four databases listed above have sought to preserve the essence of the longer documents while reducing them to a more manageable size for students. For many of the lengthier documents, instructors have the option to select either a longer or briefer version for customized readers. The database editors customarily introduce each document with a background paragraph, and *Custom Courseware* includes pedagogically useful "Questions to Consider" before each document.

<sup>4</sup>Irwin Unger and Robert R. Tomes, eds. *American Issues*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004).

<sup>5</sup>Citing all of the good readers in American history is difficult since there are so many. A short list of readers include Raymond M. Hyser and J. Christopher Arndt, eds., *Voices of the American Past*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston, MA: Wadsworth Publishing, 2008); Paul F. Boller, Jr., ed., *A More Perfect Union*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005); Eric Foner, ed., *Voices of Freedom*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008); Elliott Gorn, Randy Roberts, and Terry Bilhartz, eds., *Constructing the American Past*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2008); Michael P. Johnson, *Reading the American Past*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2009).

<sup>6</sup>In June 2008, Cengage Learning purchased the College Division of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. This purchase included *Custom Courseware*.

Selecting documents that highlight certain themes is instructively constructive, and so too is selecting documents appropriate for comparison and contrast. In my primary document-based course entitled *American Social and Intellectual History*, for example, I have students compare and contrast George Bancroft's "The Office of the People" (1835) with Henry David Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" (1849); William Graham Sumner's "What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other" (1883) with Thorstein Veblen's "Theory of the Leisure Class" (1899); and Booker T. Washington's "Atlanta Exposition Address" (1895) with W.E.B. Du Bois' "The Niagara Movement" (1905), among others.<sup>7</sup>

### Active Reading and Reflective-Questions Assignments

The main-points assignment usually persuades student-presenters to read carefully the documents they are presenting. Motivating other class members to read the documents with similar care, and thus laying the foundations for constructive discussions after a student's presentation, often requires an additional assignment. One simple yet effective assignment is to require students to answer questions about the document. If instructors use *Custom Courseware*, they can convert the "questions to consider" accompanying each document into an assignment to induce students to read the documents actively. Having students answer these questions in a short paragraph or two enhances class discussion, and such an assignment also improves skills in active-reading and critical thinking by compelling students to contemplate the question while they read.

Many of my students initially resented question-assignments but soon came to value how answering the "questions to consider" improved their comprehension. When asked in an evaluation of my *American Social and Intellectual History* course if the "questions to consider" assignments had increased their comprehension of the documents, 22 out of the 24 anonymous student respondents agreed they had. One student replied: "I hate to admit this but yes, [the assigned questions were useful]. If you read the questions before reading the document it helped you follow along and underline important ideas or terms. It also gave you insight about what you were about to read and what to look for." Another student wrote that "answering those questions helped me comprehend the topics of study better than just reading the material." Other responses were more abstract but nevertheless positive. One student commented that answering the "questions to consider" "made the reading more meaningful and forced me to think much deeper than surface reading of the texts." Another student simply wrote that the question-assignments "helped me by making me think."

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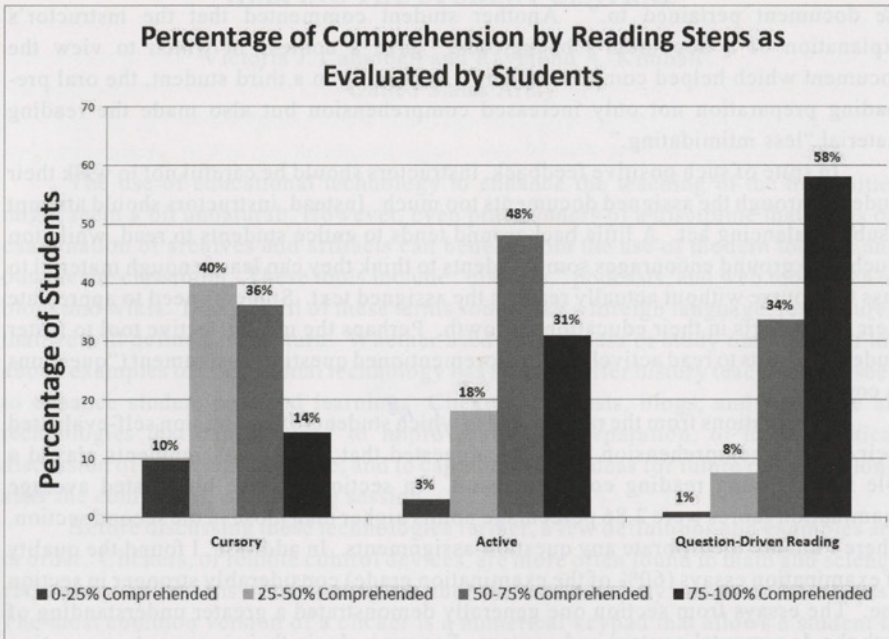
<sup>7</sup>The course website has lists of the documents and presentation schedule. I also post the main-points assignments online at [http://www.tamut.edu/academics/imperri/AmSolnHis/F07/AmSolnHist%20\(F-07\).htm](http://www.tamut.edu/academics/imperri/AmSolnHis/F07/AmSolnHist%20(F-07).htm).

### A Study: Evaluating Students' Self-Reports of Reading Comprehension

In a recent semester, I required students to complete a rating scale for all 52 of the assigned documents in one of my two sections of *American Social and Intellectual History*. I asked students in the first section to read the document three times, first reading the document cursorily, then reading the document using the active-reading techniques outlined above, and finally reading the document to answer assigned questions. The rating scale asked students to record the percentage of the document they thought they understood after each reading, using the following scale: 0-25%, 25-50%, 50-70% or 75-100%. The rating-scale data collected from all assigned documents show the students' aggregate self-evaluations of their reading comprehension but did not accurately measure actual comprehension. Nevertheless, self-evaluations do measure students' perceptions of their comprehension and such perceptions largely reflect students' confidence to examine both cognitively and verbally the documents discussed in class. This confidence, in turn, tends to enhance learning, make the class discussions more engaging, and increase students' motivation to read carefully other documents assigned in the course.

The aggregate rating-scale data indicate students perceived their comprehension increased with each additional reading. Upon a cursory reading, only 50 percent of the students reported comprehending 50 percent of the documents and only 14 percent claimed to understand 75 percent or more (see graph). After reading the document actively, students reported a dramatic rise in comprehension, with 79 percent reporting that they understood more than half the readings, while 31 percent reported they understood 75 percent or more. Answering the "questions to consider" further increased comprehension. After completing the assignment, 92 percent of the students claimed to comprehend over 50 percent of the documents, with 58 percent reporting to understand 75 percent or more.

Having only 58 percent of the students believe they understood 75 percent or more of the document after three readings—plus an assignment—might seem low, but students reported considerable variation in comprehension among the documents. Eighty-nine percent of the students reported that they understood between 75 and 100 percent of the most current document the class examined—George Bush's March 2003 speech, "President Says Saddam Hussein Must Leave Iraq within 48 Hours: Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation"—and 100 percent claim to have understood at least 50 percent of the speech. In comparison, only 31 percent reported they understood George Bancroft's *The Progress of Mankind*, written in 1854. Considering the differences in time and language between these two documents, the students' different level of perceived comprehension is understandable.



Less understandable were other results of the rating scale. Fifty percent of the students claimed that they understood 75 percent or more of John Winthrop's "Model of Christian Charity" (1630), and 58 percent reported the same for Winthrop's "Little Speech on Liberty" (1645), even though these documents usually receive the most complaints about difficult language. Perhaps my alerting the students to the difficulty of these documents and requiring them to answer the accompanying "questions to consider" primed them to read actively and ultimately increased their comprehension—or, at least, perception of comprehension. On the other hand, I was disappointed to learn that only 40 percent reported understanding in the top quarter percentile Alexander Stephens's "Slavery and the Confederacy" (1861). Because I usually have many students who voice a passionate interest in the Civil War, I had assumed that most in this class would think they understood Stephens's speech—which is not particularly abstruse—with little pre-reading preparation. I was wrong. In this case, pre-reading preparation proved more effective for improving comprehension than mere student interest in the topic.

In their anonymous evaluations, students expressed a special appreciation for the instructor orally providing a general background to certain documents before their reading. When asked about the utility of such a background, 23 out of 24 respondents thought that this form of pre-reading preparation helped comprehension. One student wrote that "the professor could set the stage mentally for whatever event or situation

the document pertained to." Another student commented that the instructor's explanation of a document's background "gave a context in which to view the document which helped comprehension." According to a third student, the oral pre-reading preparation not only increased comprehension but also made the reading material "less intimidating."

In spite of such positive feedback, instructors should be careful not to walk their students through the assigned documents too much. Instead, instructors should attempt a subtle balancing act. A little background tends to entice students to read, while too much background encourages some students to think they can learn enough material to pass the course without actually reading the assigned text. Students need to appreciate their own efforts in their educational growth. Perhaps the most effective tool to foster students' efforts to read actively is the aforementioned question-assignment ("questions to consider").

Observations from the rating scale in which students of one section self-evaluated their reading-comprehension progress suggested that question-assignments played a role in increasing reading comprehension. In section one the unadjusted average examination scores were 2.86 percentage points higher than those in the second section, where I did not incorporate any question-assignments. In addition, I found the quality of examination essays (60% of the examination grade) considerably stronger in section one. The essays from section one generally demonstrated a greater understanding of both the documents' content and context. For example, in their answers to a question that asked students to compare and contrast Booker T. Washington's "Atlanta Exposition Address" with W.E.B. Du Bois' "The Niagara Movement," more students in section one addressed the different backgrounds of the two authors, as well as the common difficulties with discrimination that African Americans experienced at the turn of the nineteenth century.

I also found the quality of discussion in section one substantially higher than in section two, even though section two was a smaller class with some excellent students. Students in section one more frequently and reflectively challenged or defended the authors' premises by pointing out pertinent exceptions or qualifications. They also were quicker to express supportive or detractive analogies regarding the authors' arguments. On the whole, they displayed more critical thinking about the assigned readings.

## **Conclusion**

Students and instructors should not shun valuable texts or documents in history because they might be difficult to read. Instead, they should view such material as a challenge that necessitates active reading. Assignments that foster active-reading techniques usually increase reading comprehension and critical thinking. Having students who have thought about the material will lead to more sophisticated and lively class discussions, and instructors too will profit.



## **THE BLENDED HISTORY CLASSROOM: KEEPING THE STUDENT CENTRAL**

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United States Army

The use of educational technology to enhance the teaching of the humanities might seem a bit unnatural. However, even practitioners of a discipline that relies on examination of archives and artifacts can benefit from the use of modern tools in and outside the classroom. These tools include "clickers," podcasts, and web tools such as blogs and wikis. If any or all of these terms sound like a foreign language, rest assured that we will define each in turn. Whether used during class or study time, each of the above examples of educational technology has much to offer history teachers who seek to enhance student-centered learning. Clickers, podcasts, blogs, and wikis are all technologies that can be used to improve student preparation, to inspire critical discussion of historical evidence, and to capture student ideas for future reflection long after the completion of the class session.

Before discussing these technologies further, a few definitions and examples are in order. Clickers, or remote control devices, are more often found in math and science classrooms as a means of measuring whether students correctly understand concepts. The most common version of a clicker is a numerical keypad that allows a student to select from a variety of answers to a multiple choice question, usually projected on a screen as a PowerPoint slide. Once students have "voted" on the answer, the percentage of votes for each answer appears graphically on the screen, providing the teacher with feedback on student comprehension and students with feedback about how their answers compared to those of classmates. This information, as we will see, helps the teacher direct subsequent discussions.

Blogs, wikis, and podcasts are all online tools commonly found on the Internet. Blogs, short for "weblogs," consist of a series of short comments on various topics, all linked together so a user can read the entries from start to finish. On the Internet, blogs function as diaries, personal rants on political topics, or even marketing tools. The most important element that distinguishes blogs from simple content on a webpage is that blogs allow other users to comment on what's been posted. In distance learning, teachers can use blogs to review and comment on student journals or as a means for students to comment collectively on a text. We use them to communicate with students, and for students to give us feedback outside of the classroom.

Wikis are a collection of linked web pages that can be edited by multiple users, often forming the basis for entire websites. Like blogs, wikis also allow for online collaboration; however, the format and purpose of a wiki is different. Rather than following the linear format of a blog, in which users read entries in list form from start to finish, the format of a wiki tends to resemble that of a web. The purpose of a wiki also differs from that of a blog in that a blog is a series of comments from individual users, while each page in a wiki is a space in which all users collaborate on shared

content. While it is possible to “drill down” into a wiki and see the contributions of each individual, the default view is one seamless document. The best known wiki is, of course, Wikipedia, the bane of history instructors everywhere; however, as we will discuss, wikis can also be used constructively in a history classroom.

While blogs and wikis exist for use on the Internet, podcasts are designed to be downloaded from the Internet and played on a computer or portable media player. Want to watch that segment from the news last night on the anniversary of D-Day? Download it from the broadcasting agency’s website and play it on your iPod. Missed an episode of your favorite news broadcast? Chances are, you can find it online and view it right on your desktop. Podcasts allow their creators to integrate video and audio content and package their produce in a format that is accessible to anyone with a computer or an mp3 player. This is a format that is also useful in studying history.

### Literature Review

For the purposes of this paper, we will use Russell Osguthorpe and Charles Graham’s definition of the term “blended learning” as the following:

Blended learning combines face-to-face with distance delivery systems ... it all comes back to teaching methodologies—pedagogies that change according to the unique needs of learners. Those who use blended learning are trying to maximize the benefits of both face-to-face and online methods—using the web for what it does best, and using class time for what it does best.<sup>1</sup>

The existing literature suggests that the use of technology to create a student-centered blended learning environment in the teaching of the humanities is very feasible, but **only if that implementation supports the existing norms of the course and is seamlessly integrated into the learning environment.** Lynna Ausburn’s 2004 survey of course design elements most valued by adult learners suggests a real need for this type of approach. The top three goals identified by students in the survey as having the most value to them personally were to “provide options for individualization/customization of learning,” to “facilitate self-directed learning,” and to “provide variety in learning activities and assignments.”<sup>2</sup> Although it seems obvious, the impact of faculty best and worst practices on a student-centered environment cannot be

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<sup>1</sup>Russell T. Osguthorpe and Charles R. Graham, “Blended Learning Environments: Definitions and Directions,” *The Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 4:3 (2003), 227.

<sup>2</sup>Lynna J. Ausburn, “Course Design Elements Most Valued by Adult Learners in Blended Online Education Environments: An American Perspective,” *Educational Media International*, 41:4 (2004), 330-331.

overstated. Fernando Mortera-Gutierrez's 2006 paper suggests several key elements that might appear to be simple and routine, but in fact require a great deal of planning to implement properly. These elements include making direct social contact with students to help familiarize them with the learning interface and periodically re-orienting students into the blended environment to help them understand its utility.<sup>3</sup>

The actual mechanism for integration of a blended learning environment in the humanities can vary greatly depending on the effects sought by the instructor. Jo Ann Oravec has shown the utility of blogging in education for a variety of tasks, such as student comments on classroom activities or further reflections on course material.<sup>4</sup> Brian Lamb has written about the multiple uses of wikis in courses to allow both students and instructors to collaborate more effectively, improve their editing and writing, and expand their own network literacy and confidence in educational technology.<sup>5</sup> The Georgia Tech Collaborative Software Lab has shown how an entire suite of tools can be deployed and tailored to meet the needs of individual instructors who seek alternative approaches to energizing students.<sup>6</sup> **What all of these approaches have in common is a desire to shape the available tools of technology to meet the needs of teachers and students, rather than forcing them to conform to the technology.**

We developed the methods described below for use in the first-year core history classroom at the United States Military Academy at West Point. Although over 800 students take the first-year history course, consisting of HI107: Western Civilization and HI108: Regional Studies in World History, all 800 students meet together in one lecture hall only one or two times each semester. For the other 38 lessons, faculty members teach groups of approximately sixteen students at a time using the Thayer Method, which focuses on student participation rather than instructor lecture.<sup>7</sup> West

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<sup>3</sup>Fernando Mortera-Gutierrez, "Faculty Best Practices Using blended Learning in E-Learning and Face-to-Face Instruction," *International Journal on E-Learning*, 5:3 (2006), 334.

<sup>4</sup>Jo Ann Oravec, "Blending by Blogging: Weblogs in Blended Learning Initiatives," *Journal of Educational Media*, 28:2 (2003), 229-230.

<sup>5</sup>Brian Lamb, "Wide Open Spaces: Wikis, Ready or Not," *Educause Review*, 39:5 (2004), 44.

<sup>6</sup>Collaborative Software Lab, Georgia Institute of Technology, *A Catalog of CoWeb Uses*, November 2, 2000: 3, <ftp://ftp.cc.gatech.edu/pub/gvu/tr/2000/00-19.pdf> (accessed May 28, 2008).

<sup>7</sup>The Thayer Method, named for Colonel Sylvanus Thayer, the "father" of the Military Academy, requires that each student come to class prepared to recite what they studied the night before. Teachers might ask students to go to the blackboards that line the walls of each classroom and work a math problem or outline an answer to a question about the night's reading, and then present their work to the class. Whether students "take boards" or not, the students provide input for class discussion, which

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Point faculty also employ some of these methods in small seminar courses (HI498: Colloquium in History and HI499: Senior Thesis) in which no more than six history majors research and write their senior theses with a faculty member who is an expert in the students' field of study. (Supervising more than six theses is extremely difficult due to the amount of time involved.) For all classes at West Point, teachers expect students to come to class ready to use what they have studied. Teachers might ask students to demonstrate their understanding of the material in class discussions, individual or group presentations, debates, or unannounced quizzes, all of which focus on student input rather than instructor output. The instructors encourage teamwork, but every student is responsible for his or her own learning. Since the quality of the classroom experience depends significantly on the quality of student preparation, the teachers' return for improving student preparation is high. The use of wikis and blogs has proven successful in this regard. Likewise, clickers, digital board work,<sup>8</sup> and wiki posts can successfully measure student comprehension of historical concepts and inspire student-led discussion. Finally, podcasts and wiki posts capture student analysis and synthesis in a format that allows students to go back and reflect on what they have learned in the classroom. Although West Point's classrooms all have computers, overhead projectors, and wireless access, such access is not a prerequisite for the employment of these educational technologies. In fact, many of these methods could be employed through the use of flashcards, paper copies, chalkboards, or email.

### Student Preparation for Class

To help improve class preparation, both of us use a "class blog" on our class websites, the intent of which is to help streamline communications to students, as well as provide a mechanism for feedback and post-lesson reflection. Typical blog posts fall into one of three categories: guidance for an upcoming lesson, feedback on a previous activity, and an "open thread" for assistance on major course assignments. The guidance blog posts serve as a supplement to the existing course guide,<sup>9</sup> providing

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<sup>7</sup>(...continued)

teachers facilitate using the Socratic Method. All students are responsible for the material they are assigned to study, whether they discuss it during class or not. In support of the Thayer Method, class sizes average sixteen students, and a typical semester's course load is four classes per faculty member.

<sup>8</sup>We often require students to write a thesis statement or outline an answer to a question on a chalkboard and brief it to the class. Digital board work takes this approach on the computer instead of a chalkboard, with students preparing their briefing in Microsoft Word or PowerPoint and projecting it on a screen for all to see. See below for further details.

<sup>9</sup>The course guide contains daily reading assignments, key terms to identify and understand, and daily lesson questions students should be able to answer from the reading. We also provide "block questions,"  
(continued...)

students some additional context on how the reading fits into the overall course objectives and telling them what to expect from a classroom session. The feedback blog posts are a way of cutting into the lag between in-class graded activities and the return of answers and ideas on those activities. The feedback posts are not an exhaustive list of right and wrong answers from quizzes. Instead, they cover trends that we saw occurring across the section that students need to correct for future discussions, papers, and exams. This rapid turn-around of feedback keeps us honest in terms of quickly grading in-class assignments and allows diligent students the opportunity to integrate that feedback prior into their next lesson. The "open threads" are just that, blog posts focused on a specific assignment in which students can post questions or concerns about the assignment as they come up. Sometimes we answer these questions ourselves, but sometimes other students answer the question before we have the opportunity. When the latter happens, it is almost always accurate and provides a great reinforcement of the student-centered learning concept.

Another means of improving class preparation is the use of a wiki post as a basis for class discussion. Essentially, the wiki post serves as an online, section-wide reaction paper that students read before class and discuss during class. Students sign up to lead part of the daily discussion for each lesson and post material for discussion to a designated page on the class website. During class, students present their posts and lead discussions covering the content and format of their post. After class, students update their posts based on feedback from classmates. The content requirements of the assignment vary, depending on the focus of the course. In the core course, students answer daily lesson study questions,<sup>10</sup> while seminar students submit a review of a unique article or book review related to the day's lesson and read their peers' posts prior to the class meeting. Since seminar students use the posts to familiarize themselves with the thesis and main points of the authors their peers have read before class, seminar discussions center more on analysis and synthesis of lesson material. While reading the post before class is not an emphasis for students in the core course, those who do use it in preparation believe they have a better grasp of the basic narrative than by reading the textbook alone.

In integrating both the wiki and the blog, a critical design element is the idea of the "one-stop shop" for course information. Simply put, our intent is to minimize the number of different places that students have to seek out in order to find course information. This makes the course website itself less of a digital archive of documents

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<sup>9</sup>(...continued)

which address overarching course themes and help students to synthesize the content of multiple daily lessons.

<sup>10</sup>For example, a student who signed up for a wiki post on the lesson on the Russian Revolutions of February and October, 1917, might address the question "How did the Bolsheviks attempt to create a new social and cultural order?"

used for course planning, such as the syllabus, course guide, and paper instructions, and focuses it instead on only what students need to study for each lesson. Independent research conducted by a colleague showed that the likelihood of cadets using online resources in their course participation dropped off precipitously when they had to go to more than one site.<sup>11</sup> This presents a challenge, since the course management software suite we use at West Point (Blackboard) does not have organic wiki or blog functions. However, Blackboard does allow us to set the entry page to something outside of the standard Blackboard pages, so we were able to create our blogs and wikis in the Academy's internal SharePoint<sup>12</sup> space and have the Blackboard course website open directly to the new course website we created.<sup>13</sup> The result is, as far as students are concerned, a single site where they can go for current course information and access portions of course documents such as the syllabus and the course notebook that are relevant to the day's lesson. Anecdotal feedback from students suggest that this has made the use of the blog and wiki much easier and more convenient and makes students better prepared for classes than those in which such tools are not used.

### Students in the Spotlight

The most important aspect of creating a student-centered learning environment in the classroom is removing the teacher from the role of "giver of all knowledge"—in Alison King's words, moving from "Sage on the Stage" to "Guide on the Side."<sup>14</sup> One way to do this is to use "clickers" that allow students to submit answers anonymously and then seek feedback from each other. As mentioned above, "clickers" are small remotes that feed into a PowerPoint-based slide show—students press a number on a remote that corresponds with an answer to a multiple choice question posted on a screen. The teacher then displays the overall percentage of answers, **but not specifics of each student's answer**. Students then pair off and seek feedback from each other about what each had answered and why; after a short conference, they get another chance to answer the question, in every case, this simple technique improves student

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<sup>11</sup>James L. Doty III, "Online Reading: The Perceptions and Practices of Cadets in an Advanced History Class," unpublished manuscript, August 2007, Center for Teaching Excellence, West Point, NY, 8.

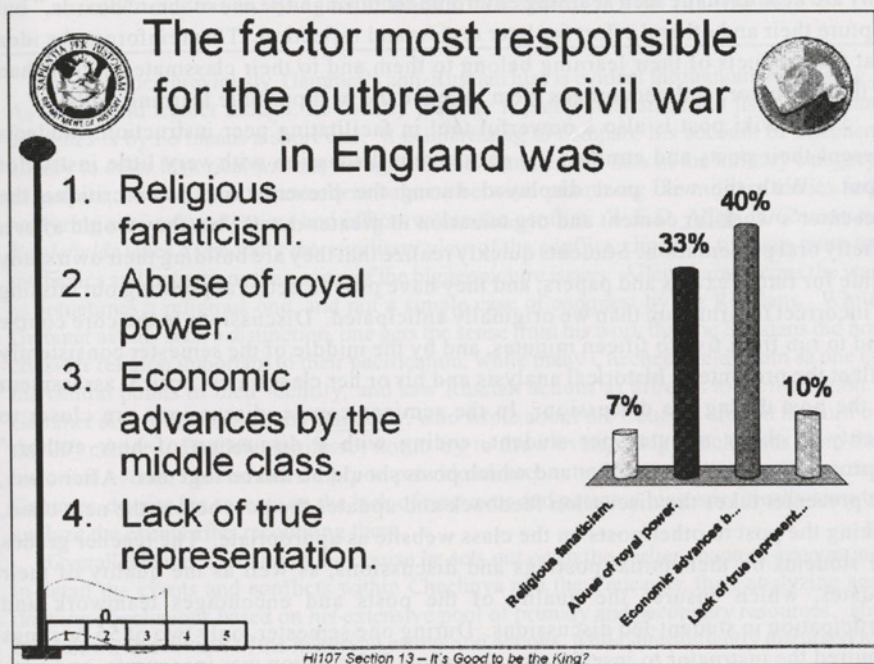
<sup>12</sup>SharePoint is a Microsoft product designed to provide web-based functions for collaboration. We use it because our institution has an existing software license for it. Many open-source blog and wiki software sources exist, so the specific software used is less important than the capability it brings.

<sup>13</sup>The specific procedure for doing this will vary depending on your Course Management software and your school's network policies. You should definitely enlist the help of your local IT guru before trying this.

<sup>14</sup>Alison King, "From Sage on the Stage to Guide on the Side," *College Teaching*, 41:1 (1993), 30-35.

understanding of the presented concept with minimal intervention by the teacher. The questions are not always simple “pick one” objective-type questions—sometimes, they are subjective answers for which there is no clear answer. For instance, during a lesson on the English Civil War, students were asked to pick which factor in a list was “most responsible” for the crisis. After making their selection, students had to defend their choice with appropriate evidence. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1: Sample PowerPoint Slide with student answers in TurningPoint



The specific system we used for this purpose was the TurningPoint Remote Response System. However, several other comparable systems exist, and similar effects could be achieved even with a simple set of flash cards. The key here is not the technology: It is how that technology integrates into the overall goal of a student-centered learning environment.

In a similar vein, students are sometimes tasked to create “digital boards.” One of the oldest traditions at West Point is the academic practice of “taking boards,” in which cadets are required to go to their individual blackboard in the classroom and write out the answer to a question posed by an instructor. The idea of “digital boards” continues this proven pedagogical technique, but adds in an advantage of making the student’s work portable. Students access their “board” assignments prior to class via

the blog; this assignment is usually group-driven, and students author their "board" on a simple PowerPoint slide. The instructor reviews these submissions briefly prior to class, giving students feedback and suggestions on elements needing improvement. The student groups each take turns briefing their "boards" on their computers and projecting them onto a shared screen; after they brief, the instructor captures an image of the "board" and saves it to the course blog. Again, the specific medium is not important here; we could just as easily have students email the slides to the instructor or even take mobile phone pictures of written boards. The critical element here is that students not only are able to shape their learning environment through the use of their "boards," but capture their and others' effort for later review and reflection. This reinforces the idea that the products of their learning belong to them and to their classmates, rather than to the instructor, and encourages them to make the best possible learning tools.

The wiki post is also a powerful tool in facilitating peer instruction. Students present their posts and conduct the subsequent discussion with very little instructor input. With the wiki post displayed during the presentation, peers critique the presenter's work for content and organization in greater detail than they would after a strictly oral presentation. Students quickly realize that they are building their own study guide for future exams and papers, and they have proven better at pointing out missing or incorrect information than we originally anticipated. Discussions in the core course tend to run from five to fifteen minutes, and by the middle of the semester consistently reflect the presenter's historical analysis and his or her classmates' critical assessment of the post during the discussion. In the seminar course, discussions are closer to twenty to thirty minutes per student, ending with a discussion of how authors' approaches relate to each other and which posts should be linked together. After class, the presenter takes the discussion feedback and updates the post before the next class, linking the post to other posts on the class website as appropriate. The teacher grades the students on their initial postings and discussions, as well as the quality of their updates, which ensures the quality of the posts and encourages teamwork and participation in student-led discussions. During one semester, only two of 55 postings required the instructor to insert a note that some information was inaccurate, and both postings were updated voluntarily as a result of that feedback. As with the methods described above, wiki posts are not platform-dependent. On days when the class meets off-site, we use printed copies of wiki post for discussion. The only loss of functionality by using paper copies would be the loss of links to related information in other posts, which remains one of the greatest strengths of using a wiki.

### **Reflecting on Learning: Classroom Optional**

Capturing feedback from class discussions in the wiki posts as 25 percent of their grade for the assignment forces presenters to reflect after class on what they have learned. This reflection is not limited to the presenter, however. Once the teacher links the completed and graded post to the lesson web page, students in the core course can



incorporate that information as part of their review for exams. By linking their own posts to the analyses of their classmates, students in the seminar course conduct more sophisticated analysis, capturing comparisons between the works discussed in class as part of what becomes a dynamic historiography library. (See Figure 2.) Each student's analysis contains links to student reviews of other books, which proves quite useful as a point of reference months later as students begin to write their theses.

Figure 2: Excerpt from analysis by a student in HI 498 with links to other student analyses underlined (links appear in blue in original)

As mentioned previously, Gammer's anti-Russian bias is evident throughout the reading. As one would expect though, he usually justifies it pretty well since the list of Russian atrocities is by no means a short one. It is interesting to compare his account of Chechen history to other historical writers, though. While Gammer still falls in the military category of authors, he maintains an excellent balance between examining the military tactics and analyzing soci-cultural causes and effects within the conflict. W.E.D. Allen, in *Caucasian Battlefields* takes a generally more military view of the conflict, choosing to focus more on the tactics and operations than some of the bigger picture issues. Allen characterizes the war as sometimes a religious one, and not a simple case of conquest by the Russians. While Gammer avoids such a distinction, one gets the sense from his work that the Russians did not consider religion important to their pacification, while many Chechens held Islam as one of the central points of their identity, and saw Russian actions as affronts to their religion. Gammer also differs from John Baddeley, who wrote about the Caucasus around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Baddeley professes not to try to draw overarching conclusions from the historical events, but instead simply to provide an account of the events in the Caucasus. Gammer, despite his caveats on the lack of resources and personal bias, specifically aims to analyze the events after recounting them.

Overall, Gammer continues the course he sets out on in the earlier chapters—recounting in detail the events and conflicts within Chechnya and the Caucasus, then analyzing and drawing conclusions based on his extensive pool of primary and secondary resources. His breakdown and review of the historical events and actions, while intermittently disrupted by his anti-Russian bias, is extremely logical and useful to us as students of the Russian military experience.

Because our students have grown up in a multimedia environment, many learn better when they can gather more about an experience than just read words on a page. So, we have students create podcasts. The intent of the podcast is to create a mechanism for promoting student reflection *after* the lesson. Students commit themselves to provide podcasts after selected lessons, making the choice on a first-come, first-served basis. After a lesson, their responsibility is to create a short audio recording (not to exceed three minutes) explaining how the material covered in that

lesson answered one or more “block questions.”<sup>15</sup> They then must identify at least one visual element—either still photo or video—that illustrates the points they are trying to make and integrate it into the narrative as a single video file. Students are assisted in this task by a step-by-step tutorial that shows them exactly how to produce the video using readily available software. Students then submit the podcast to the website, where the instructor reviews it and provides amplifying comments. Other students then can download some or all of the podcasts for use later as a visual study guide.

### Assessment and Feedback

As part of the USMA Course End assessment program, students in all sections of HI107 and HI108 comment on the impact of the course on their learning. The results from both courses in 2008 (displayed in Tables 1 and 2) show a clear positive impact of the blended learning style.

Table 1. Student Feedback in HI107

HI107 Course-End Questions <sup>16</sup>	Blended Sections % “Strongly Agree/Agree”	Coursewide % “Strongly Agree/Agree”
This instructor encouraged students to be responsible for their own learning.	92/8	63/34
This instructor used effective techniques for learning, both in class and out of class.	83/17	41/41
My fellow students contributed to my learning in this course.	83/17	44/44
In this course, my critical thinking ability increased.	83/8	39/39

<sup>15</sup>In addition to the daily lesson questions, our Course Guide included questions that require students to synthesize information across multiple lessons, which we call “block questions.”

<sup>16</sup>The Course-End Questions are from a standard set of questions students answer for all common core courses at the United States Military Academy.

Table 2. Student Feedback in HI108

HI108 Course-End Questions <sup>16</sup>	Blended Sections % “Strongly Agree/Agree”	Coursewide % “Strongly Agree/Agree”
This instructor encouraged students to be responsible for their own learning.	67/33	62/36
This instructor used effective techniques for learning, both in class and out of class.	70/30	46/42
My fellow students contributed to my learning in this course.	61/33	49/42
In this course, my critical thinking ability increased.	61/36	41/44

Anonymous written feedback was equally powerful, as it showed a clear understanding of the purpose and intent behind the application of the technologies:

“[The technique] forces you to do critical thinking.”

“We can thoroughly discuss a question and explore its possibilities.”

“I love [the instructor’s] teaching style and his high expectations drive me to work hard for the class. I know that laziness will not slide with [the instructor].”

“You should share this with other departments. I wish all my instructors did this.”

Feedback from USMA faculty has also been positive. Within the Department of History, many faculty members have adopted some of these techniques and adapted them to their own teaching styles. The use of educational technology has become a regular topic for discussion during faculty seminars and new faculty orientation. Faculty members from a wide range of departments have expressed interest in adopting some of these methods for their own courses.

## Conclusion

Blended teaching and learning in history is not for everyone—it is very much a function of comfort with technology and alignment with individual teaching styles.

Below are some guidelines that have guided us in our implementation and adaptation of the above techniques.<sup>17</sup>

**“Technology can’t make bad pedagogy good; it can make good pedagogy better.”**

Simply adding a blog or wiki to a course does not make a “blended course” or improve its effectiveness immediately. In fact, if the implementation of additional elements works in opposition to existing practices in the classroom, it actually can increase student and teacher frustration and negatively impact learning. Before considering a blended learning environment, educators should look at the overall goals and objectives of the course to see which was most compatible with a blended approach. Similarly, individual educators should implement only those technologies and techniques that best support their own teaching styles rather than try to use a “one size fits all” approach to blended course design. “Grafting” new technologies onto old course design rarely works. The ideal time to implement a blended approach is when courses are undergoing significant changes already. This was our approach with new HI107 and HI108 course designs. Starting over with a new syllabus allowed us significant latitude to innovate in the classroom.

**“If technology is the focus, learning isn’t.”**

All new instructional techniques, whether technology-based or not, have an opportunity cost in terms of instructional time. A popular myth suggests that students now are so savvy technologically that they will adapt easily to any new technology, leaving teachers to fumble with the user’s manual. While it is true that students of today’s generation are avid *consumers* of technology, only a select few are adept at *adapting* or *innovating* using the same technologies. Therefore, when planning the integration of new technologies, we must plan consciously when we will integrate orientation of the new technologies. We must never lose sight of the fact that the ultimate purpose of implementing a new technique is to improve teaching and learning. Technologies that suck away more classroom time than they save should be avoided at all costs. Some ways to mitigate the time impact of implementation are authoring step-by-step references that students can consult on their own, choosing products that use familiar designs (e.g. Microsoft WYSIWYG<sup>18</sup>), and collaborating with other common courses at your institution to define best practices of technology use.

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<sup>17</sup>A version of these guidelines was originally presented by Kimball at the June 2007 ED-Media World Conference on Educational Multimedia, Hypermedia, & Telecommunications in Vancouver, Canada, in a talk entitled “The Digital History Classroom: A Case Study.”

<sup>18</sup>WYSIWYG = What You See Is What You Get. This is the standard set of tools, found most often in Microsoft Office products that quickly allows users to perform formatting tasks like boldfacing or aligning text.

**“Focus on the product, not the platform.”**

All too often, technology integration in the classroom happens because the school or department has bought a shiny new toy, which now needs to be used in order to prove its value. While forward purchases of IT can be useful in allowing for individual innovation by educators, all too often it ends up forcing teachers down paths they would prefer to avoid. A better technique is to focus on the *product*. Ask yourself: What do I want to get out of this process? Once you have identified the product, then you can look at options available to meet that desired effect or endstate. In some of the techniques above, we noted that the particular effect could have been met with a different platform or technique; this helps make the approach more applicable to schools that might have varying resources or budgets.

Ultimately, using a blended approach in teaching history is all about one thing: capturing the imagination of students and centering the learning process on them. Having students take ownership of their learning and seek to interpret historical events better for themselves will pay dividends well beyond the classroom itself. As Sam Wineburg points out, such interpretation is vital to having well-informed citizens who are able to integrate historical perspective into their current experiences.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

## INTRODUCING THEORETICAL ISSUES THROUGH POPULAR HISTORICAL FILMS

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Having enjoyed (or endured) linguistic and cultural turns, we historians are now faced with a "pictorial turn."<sup>1</sup> As a number of commentators and practitioners in the rapidly burgeoning sub-discipline of "history and film" have observed, we now inhabit a post-literate society in which the majority of people gain historical information from movies and television.<sup>2</sup> After teaching courses on historical film for seven years, I am convinced that popular historical films (Hollywood) provide an effective means of not only engaging (sometimes reluctant) students with the past but also of demonstrating key elements of all historical knowledge and its representational modes.<sup>3</sup> These are professionally-central historiographical and theoretical concerns that are difficult to broach without a degree of abstraction usually beyond the experience and interest of most undergraduates. I now teach a first-year course "History on Film" that coheres around a study of films illustrative of themes, processes, events, and personalities in late medieval and early modern Western Civilization. The following discussion outlines the introductory class in this course and its connection with later teaching themes and strategies. It shows how popular historical films provide a uniquely effective means whereby students can acquire "high-order [historical] skills."<sup>4</sup>

In all my teaching, I take care to construct the initial class in a course as a miniature version of the entire course. I outline the content and model the skills that

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<sup>1</sup>See Sol Cohen, "An Innocent Eye: The 'Pictorial Turn,' Film Studies, and History," *History of Education Quarterly*, 43 (Summer 2003), 250-61.

<sup>2</sup>Robert A. Rosenstone is perhaps the most prolific and accessible commentator on the relationship between history and film. See particularly his "History in Images/History in Words: Reflections on the Possibility of Really Putting History onto Film," *American Historical Review*, 93 (December 1988), 1173-1185, and *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995). For a brief survey of the sub-discipline see Robert Brent Toplin and Jason Eudy, "The Historian Encounters Film: A Historiography," *Magazine of History*, 16 (Summer 2002), 7-12.

<sup>3</sup>As John E. O'Connor remarked: "Once involved in the discussion of authenticity and historical representation in film and television, students will begin to ask the same questions of what they read." "History in Images/Images in History: Reflections on the Importance of Film and Television Study for an Understanding of the Past," *American Historical Review*, 93 (December 1988), 1208.

<sup>4</sup>Seán Lang, "Mushrooms and Snake-Oil: Using Film at AS/A Level," *Teaching History*, 108 (September 2002), 44-48. Note this journal called *Teaching History* is published in the United Kingdom.

I expect students to acquire throughout the semester. In many ways, the rest of the course provides reinforcement, elaboration, and practice in these themes, skills, and content.

The students initially watch a four-minute clip from *A Knight's Tale* (2001), directed by Brian Helgeland, a romantic costume drama in which a young commoner, William Thatcher (Heath Ledger), disguises himself as a noble to compete in a series of jousting tournaments so as to become wealthy, famous, and, as he puts it, "change his stars." The clip shows two heralds introducing their respective knights prior to the knights engaging in a jousting competition.

Students then comment on the ways in which they thought the clip was or was not "historical." After a few minutes of discussion, the class arrives (to the surprise of many) at the realization that important, historically valid facts *could* be derived from a film the primary objective of which is entertainment rather than historical accuracy. Firstly, it demonstrates that late medieval European society was very hierarchical. Secondly, it shows a predominantly oral culture: Most people in this society were illiterate and the spoken word was vital. Students decided that the clothing was reasonably accurate, but was more a late-twentieth century fashion designer's attempt to make the general styles of the period interesting and attractive to modern audiences. The jousting itself was realistically rendered: The class learned that while competition could be dangerous, its objective was not to kill people. Importantly, students discovered that jousting was a contest that everyone could watch but in which only a select minority could compete. Many of the film's dramatic and comedic elements relied ultimately on this historical fact.

Clearly, the language employed in the film was unhistorical. I tell students—as some of them already knew—that in the time and places depicted in *A Knight's Tale* most people would have spoken medieval French or Middle English. Then discussion moves from the particular to the very general. Obviously, the translation of medieval languages into modern English in *A Knight's Tale* enables the film's audience to understand the story. I encourage students to consider whether other forms of "translation" occur in the process of representing other times and cultures. Given the variety of topics about which historical comment could be made that are raised by or represented in the film clip, I ask students to specify what it is that historians do. They decided that historians discover, analyze, and understand the way people in the past lived: how they worked, what they ate, thought, felt, how they dressed and enjoyed themselves, and so on. The discussion then explores the notion that historians also want to be able to *communicate* this information to other historians and to the public at large. We decided, then, that a key element of the historical enterprise is the business of *translating* the past into the present for people in the present.

Thus I encourage the class to consider the notion of history as a constructive and creative act. This is more readily observed in filmic histories where, in order to maintain narrative flow, events and characters have to be omitted, compressed, altered,

or even invented.<sup>5</sup> I then ask students to think about the ways in which many of these features of historical representation apply to even the most rigorous and scholarly of *written* histories. I ask them to consider the sorts of evidence they would need—and how they would use (or not use) it—in order to write a “history” of their own lives. For some, but not all, students it becomes apparent that the need to create a coherent and comprehensible history precludes the use of some factoids and privileges the employment of others. Upon reflection, a whole hour or a whole week could be spent fruitfully rehearsing examples of this principle.

We then turn to examine *The Patriot* (2000), directed by Roland Emmerich. I chose this film because many students (even outside the United States) will have seen it or at least have a rudimentary acquaintance with the American Revolution. *The Patriot* is in many ways a more serious historical film than *A Knight's Tale*, not least because it centers around an event about which there is enormous scholarly activity. The characters in *A Knight's Tale* are almost all invented, as are the specific events taking place on the screen. This is much less the case in *The Patriot*. But *The Patriot* has elicited more scholarly interest precisely because it takes an historical process and event about which we have much evidence and willfully ignores and falsifies much of it. I advise students that there are many ways in which the film plays fast and loose with accepted historical facts and opinion.<sup>6</sup> I encourage them, however, to subdue their inquisitiveness regarding the historical veracity of details, in favor of asking more interesting and important questions about *why* the filmmakers manipulated, distorted, or ignored the “facts” in the ways they had.

The class watches a few minutes of the film depicting the Southern plantation-owning Martin family and their happy retinue of African American “workers.” We also see the brutal and sadistic British Colonel Tavington refusing to accept the family patriarch Benjamin Martin’s (Mel Gibson) neutrality and casually shooting his young son Thomas in the back. I then make students aware of a limited number of important and revealing instances of historical inaccuracy. *The Patriot’s* treatment of slavery is commonly identified as a problematic feature by scholars,<sup>7</sup> which is but one reason why

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<sup>5</sup>Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, 68-76.

<sup>6</sup>A brief list of these can be found in Robert C. Williams, *The Historian's Toolbox: A Student's Guide to the Theory and Craft of History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), 144. A more extensive catalogue of the film's omissions and inaccuracies can be found in William Ross St. George Jr., “The Patriot,” *The Journal of American History*, 87 (December 2000), 1146-1148. I have incorporated some of these findings in my argument without further citation.

<sup>7</sup>See Ron Briley, “Incorporating Films into a History Classroom: A Teaching Note,” *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods*, 33 (Spring 2008), 28-32.



the eminent African-American filmmaker Spike Lee was so critical of the film.<sup>8</sup> Having Benjamin Martin depicted as a South Carolina plantation owner employing free African American workers rather than owning slaves is one of the film's more improbable, if not outrageous, fictions. Yet, if all students were unaware of the general nature and extent of slavery in the Southern colonies at this time, they all could appreciate the moral, aesthetic, and commercial necessity for the film's hero not to be associated with slave owning.

Colonel Tavington is based on a real historical figure, the British officer Banastre Tarleton. While historians agree that Tarleton was no saint, he was far from the genocidal psychopath portrayed in *The Patriot*. Students readily comprehend, however, that Tavington is cast in so starkly poor a light so as to contrast more effectively with Martin, thus emphasizing the film's fairly crude moral dualism. It is clear which side in the conflict is on the side of right. That Tavington is played by Jason Isaacs, recognized by many students as Lucius Malfoy in the Harry Potter films, only helps cement their appreciation of him as an outright villain and of the filmmakers' intentions in portraying him thus.

Clearly, historical facts are distorted and deployed for moral and aesthetic reasons, in order to tell a particular story with a particular point to it. I then ask students to reflect on what they think the moral of this story was. I remind them that when we watch historical films we ought to bear in mind that we are being told a story. Not a "made-up" story necessarily, in the sense of being fictional or false, but something made up in the sense that historical filmmakers actively *construct* and shape the story about the past from materials or evidence available to them. Historical filmmakers are in the business, then, of constructing stories. So are "traditional" historians. At this point, I introduce the important issue of narrative.

I explain to students that the most common way for historians to arrange facts is to use a narrative, which I define thus: "At its simplest, a narrative is a story with a beginning, middle, and end. It is an account or description of events or activities or lives which moves chronologically, and in which the details are presented and interpreted so as to give an overall sense of unity or coherence." I then apprise students that the essence of what we will look for in the course is the overall *historical* sense or message of the films we view. I stress that this is something other than the "overt narrative" or story,<sup>9</sup> but is, rather the overall *shape* the filmmaker has given to the details of the film. I then tell the class that traditional *written* histories have also been

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<sup>8</sup>"We both came out of the theatre fuming ... For three hours *The Patriot* dodged around, skirted about or completely ignored slavery. How convenient ... to have Mel Gibson's character not be a slaveholder ... *The Patriot* is pure, blatant American Hollywood propaganda. A complete whitewashing of history." "Spike Lee slams *Patriot*," *The Guardian*, July 6, 2000.

<sup>9</sup>Neil Liss and Cameron White, "Films for Our Time: Using 'Invasion of the Body Snatchers' to Teach Recent American History," *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods*, 26 (Spring 2001), 16.

similarly shaped.<sup>10</sup> All narrative histories, which means most histories, have a few themes or theses or arguments that the author wants readers to take away with them, the kinds of things one would put in a summary. That is, a few ideas which the book or essay is about, an overall *interpretation* of historical phenomena which the details of the book or essay support.<sup>11</sup> These themes are often easier to see in filmic histories than in written histories, because of the compressed scope of films. That is, a book can take days to read, while a film takes only two or three hours to watch.

Students then ponder the notion (radical for most) that histories are constructions. An effective way to make this central point is to consider fictional narratives such as novels, which virtually all students can be presumed to have read. Fictional narratives have a storyline or multiple storylines or subplots. They have characters who do things and to whom things happen. I use the example of *The Lord of the Rings* because it has certain local resonances for my students—my university is an hour's drive from "Hobbiton"—and also because most, if not all, students have seen the movies if they haven't read the novels. We decide that in this text there are hobbits who go to certain places and do certain things and there are numerous allied stories about people and elves and wizards and so on. The narrative traces the activity of these characters chronologically.

So much for the main story or narrative. But novels also have a theme or message or moral, something the story as a whole "is about." A number of themes or morals can be elicited from class discussion; yet while it is worth pointing out that multiple themes can coexist in any narrative, I have found it best at this stage to conduct explanation in terms of one of these themes. Thus, one might say that *The Lord of the Rings* is about the capacity of great power to corrupt even the best people. That is the main theme, or message, or purpose of the story, the moral of the story, one could say.

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<sup>10</sup>Hayden White has addressed this general issue most fulsomely in works like *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973). See also White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987). White also specifically explored the similarities between filmic and written histories in "Historiography and Historiophoty," *The American Historical Review*, 93 (December 1988), 1193-1199. White claims that whether we are talking about written history or filmic history, neither are "mirror image[s]" of the historical events or processes under discussion. Both are "a product of processes of condensation, displacement, symbolization, and qualification ... It is only the medium that differs, not the way in which the messages are produced." This "constructivist nature of the historian's enterprise" suggests that just as written histories don't merely show us a fact but position it, contextualize it or deploy it in ways which give it often complex significance, so can and does film. According to White, facts become historical facts only when we predicate something about them, that is, when we endow them with significance.

<sup>11</sup>In this way Rosenstone has fruitfully and sympathetically evaluated Sergei Eisenstein's classic film *October* (1928) by placing it alongside a number of notable written histories of the Russian Revolution. See "October as History," *Rethinking History*, 5 (July 2001), 255-74.

It is the major principle around which the action and characters are organized. In a sense, the action and characters exist to serve this purpose.

I then explain that history is like fiction in this respect, although things are (ideally) the other way around: In history, good history anyway, the historian examines action and characters and tries to come up with a way of understanding and summarizing their importance, their meaning. Here I mention one of the most famous works of narrative history in the English language, Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-88). This work has, as one of its main themes, the notion that civilizations will fall where superstition gains dominance over reason. This is the meaning Gibbon finds in the evidence and it informs the way he tells his story. It is also the dominant impression most readers take away from *The Decline and Fall*. I tell students that dominant themes are evident in all narrative histories and that their main concern in the course is to locate these in the films we view and discuss.

At this point, I introduce a set of concepts with which many students struggle initially, but with which they become familiar by the end of the course. I suggest to the class that the themes that are evident in all histories, whether filmic or written histories, are really stories or narratives themselves. The class then contemplates three levels of historical narrative, as defined by Allan Megill: "(1) *narrative proper*; (2) *master narrative* or synthesis, which claims to offer the authoritative account of some particular segment of history; (3) *grand narrative*, which claims to offer the authoritative account of history generally."<sup>12</sup> As I have observed that it often takes a few weeks before most students are comfortable identifying a film's narrative features, in this initial class I reassure students that a little practice will render them all competent in this skill. I then exemplify the narrative levels in *The Patriot* thus:

The *narrative proper* is the story of the various events experienced (in chronological order) by Benjamin Martin and how these impact upon him so as to cause him to change his mind from opposition to the war with Britain to full-on enthusiastic and committed involvement in it. This is the main narrative proper. In addition, there are numerous minor narratives, what we might call subplots. One example noted by students is the romantic subplot involving Martin's son Gabriel and Anne Howard.

At a deeper level, the *master narrative* exists. I ask students how *The Patriot* sums up this "segment" of history, the American Revolution. (Bearing in mind that not all students have seen the movie, one way general responses can be summarized quickly is to have groups of students read brief scholarly and non-scholarly reviews in class and

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<sup>12</sup> Allan Megill, "'Grand Narrative' and the Discipline of History," in Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner, eds., *A New Philosophy of History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 152-53. Megill goes on to define and discuss *metanarrative*. I thought this a little *too* abstract for a first class with first-year students.

report back on the way individual viewers responded to the film.<sup>13</sup>) Generally, we arrive at the view that the film shows how this period of history gave birth to a new nation, the United States, and that the creation of this new polity was driven by selfless, egalitarian individuals who refused to be pushed around by their traditional, mostly corrupt and oppressive, rulers. We agree that the film portrays the Revolution as an unequivocally good thing, an obvious victory for justice and morality. Students then learn that this moral dimension is reinforced by specific narrative choices, none of which are especially “historical.” The central character, previously reluctant to oppose Britain, has no option but to rebel when British rule, in the form of Tavington, is revealed as irremediably brutal, unjust, and tyrannical. Tavington murders not only Benjamin’s son Gabriel but also Gabriel’s wife Anne and others in another invented scene. We can point out how the romantic subplot—Gabriel’s courting and marrying of Anne—thus contributes to the master narrative. It becomes clear that the filmmakers had *historiographical* reasons for fudging *historical* evidence.

Further, less obvious, examples can be mentioned. That Tavington’s troops are shown wearing red when in fact Tarleton’s troops wore green is a minor falsification of the historical record for the purposes of depicting the enemy (“The Redcoats”) in a manner easily recognizable as such. In the same way, downplaying the real extent to which much of the fighting in the Carolinas was conducted between local loyalists and rebels (that is, individuals of similar appearance and speech) falsifies the historical record for a moral and historiographical purpose. The selection, omission, privileging, and invention of particular historical “facts” contribute to the creation of a particular master narrative: The American Revolution was essentially a war of good against evil, a victory for liberty, equality, and morality over tyranny and injustice. Thus, Martin is dissociated from the institution of slavery as he (and the cause of colonial independence) has to be aligned with a *modern* audience’s perceptions of liberty, equality, and justice if we are to arrive at a clear and uncomplicated summation of what the American Revolution was and means. A modern American audience is going to have certain expectations about the American Revolution, and clearly a film that does not meet most of these expectations (if not all of them) will not be successful commercially.

I then explain that we all have expectations about not only what a particular period of history or historical event means, but also about what history itself means. The portrayal of the American Revolution in *The Patriot* as unequivocally *progressive* is a common feature of all mainstream Hollywood historical movies.<sup>14</sup> These films suggest to the viewer that history is the story of things getting better and better. And

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<sup>13</sup>In addition to sources cited above, I have used the following: <http://trivia.com/film/patriot.htm>, <http://www.militarycorruption.com/militia.htm> and [http://www.ciao.co.uk/The\\_Patriot\\_Review\\_527641](http://www.ciao.co.uk/The_Patriot_Review_527641).

<sup>14</sup>Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, 55-56.

in this they both appeal to and entrench what is a prevalent and seductive myth in modern Western cultures. This notion or assumption or intimation that history in general is progressive is an example of a *grand narrative*.

In *The Patriot*, I suggest, this is the story of how "in history proper" or in the general course of human events good (ultimately) tends to be victorious over evil, freedom over tyranny, that there is a natural progression from oppressive, unequal, and unjust institutions and modes of life to modes that are freer and more egalitarian. Grand narratives propose that there is an underlying mechanism or structure in the story of human affairs that shapes, constrains, enables and, some would say, *determines* certain outcomes and not others.

Here I found the following illustrations helpful: An early example of a grand narrative in Western historiography is the traditional Christian view that history was ultimately the working out of God's will. That is, the Providential view. Other grand narratives stress that particular human qualities or psychological characteristics ultimately and generally explain the way individuals and societies behave within and across time. In this sense, then, Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall* suggests not only a master narrative in which the Roman Empire fell because superstition gained dominance over reason but also a grand narrative implying that this is a general rule for all civilizations. Then there are *materialist* grand narratives that propose that specific material conditions and economic practices determine human activity in a given historical moment.<sup>15</sup> Finally, I draw students' attention to the Whig view of history that proposes, among other things, that humanity's desire for liberty drives, and is gradually expressed in, the course of history. Whiggism can be seen as a kind of psychological theory of its own, one that suggests that the desire for freedom pushes history in ever-better directions. Whiggism believes in the inevitability of *progress* in human affairs. At this point students can be encouraged to come up with their own grand narratives, their own speculations, intimations, and assumptions about what history in general means or what drives historical change.

I then illustrate grand narrative through a traditional written history before applying the principle back to filmic history. I tell students that the Whigs were a political party in England in the eighteenth century that supported the supremacy of Parliament over the monarchy. "Whig history" was a term applied by the twentieth-century historian Herbert Butterfield to histories of England that saw the gradual triumph of Parliament and, relatedly, that of political liberty as a positive and, in a sense, inevitable process. I then foreground a classic expression of Whig history, Thomas Babington Macaulay's *The History of England* (1848-1861), noting how this was immensely popular and had a huge influence on the way English people thought about their past for over a century. Even though Macaulay did not see every event in

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<sup>15</sup>Here I briefly mentioned Marxism. Later in the course we examine the film *Luther* (2003) and students receive a brief introduction to Marxian and Weberian interpretations of the Protestant Reformation.

English history as positive or progressive, he believed that taken in total the overall story of modern England was a positive and progressive one. His narrative as a whole is shaped this way. And this is the impression the reader takes away from the book. So the progress of England is Macaulay's master narrative, it is his overall view of what characterizes the story of modern England, what the story of modern England means as a segment of history. And this is clearly Macaulay's intention as he states very early on: "Yet, unless I greatly deceive myself, the general effect of this chequered narrative will be to excite thankfulness in all religious minds, and hope in the breasts of all patriots. For the history of our country during the last hundred and sixty years is eminently the history of physical, of moral, and of intellectual improvement."<sup>16</sup>

"Whig" histories, then, are fundamentally progressivist. History, they tell us, generally tends, among other things, towards greater political freedom. And when we use the term now it is applied not just to histories of England, like Macaulay's, but to *all* history. In a sense, it thus becomes a grand narrative. A Whig perspective on history supposes that things are getting better all the time, naturally and inevitably.

*The Patriot* is very much a Whiggish history. At the level of master narrative, the progress from monarchic (British) rule to democratic self-rule is presented as appropriate and, in a sense, inevitable. At the level of grand narrative, the film suggests to us that history, in general, is characterized by the struggle for, and expression of, freedom.

Later in the course I screen and we discuss other films set in late-medieval and early modern Europe. These include *The Navigator: A Medieval Odyssey* (1988), directed by Vincent Ward; *The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc* (1999), directed by Luc Besson; *1492: The Conquest of Paradise* (1992), directed by Ridley Scott; *Luther* (2003), directed by Eric Till; and *Elizabeth* (1998), directed by Shekhar Kapur. All of these films can be read as narratives of the victory of reason, liberty, and modernity over corruption, superstition, and oppression. This is especially the case with *Luther* and *Elizabeth*. That such progressivism is less apparent or more complex in other films, such as *The Navigator* and *1492*, only renders those films more susceptible to the kind of extended analysis and deep learning appropriate at college level. Moreover, even as straightforward, simplistic, and "unhistorical" a film as *A Knight's Tale* can offer useful ways into the study of other historical and historiographical phenomena.

When students view *A Knight's Tale* in its entirety a few weeks later, most can isolate and appreciate its narrative implications. The good guy gets the girl and achieves his social ambitions of becoming a knight. This is clearly a progressive narrative on the overt or general narrative level and on the level of grand narrative we are encouraged to believe that suitably motivated individuals can overcome the

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<sup>16</sup>Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The History of England* (1848-1861) (London: Penguin, 1986), 52. I warn students, however, that not all master and grand narratives are so explicitly revealed as Macaulay's.

constraints of social and economic class. At this point, students can be introduced fruitfully to the structure-agency problematic through exploring the film's master narrative.

Having students uncover what *A Knight's Tale* suggests about the late Middle Ages, specifically, requires a degree of "traditional" historical instruction. To this end, I give a series of lectures introducing students to the following key topics in late-medieval European history, all of which revolved around the theme of "crisis" that most historians agree existed in this period: crises in agriculture and the economy, in religious belief, in public health, and in social structure (with special emphasis on class and gender roles). As supplementary reading, students get a chapter ("The Crisis of the Late Middle Ages") from an introductory text on Western Civilization.<sup>17</sup> I encourage students to use the information supplied by this reading to inform their responses to the films. Once students have the opportunity to view *A Knight's Tale* and to read the associated background material on the late Middle Ages, we do a tutorial class in which they engage with an extract from Christine de Pisan's "The Book of the City of Ladies."<sup>18</sup> The questions attached to this primary source reading encourage students to consider an historical individual (Christine de Pisan) as illustrating broad characteristics of the late Middle Ages. As an advocate of (supposedly) normative social practice in this period, de Pisan's writings enunciate attitudes about female behavior that society saw as integral to its stability and survival. In asking students to consider how sensible de Pisan's advice might have been to medieval women, they necessarily have to reflect on the prevalent structural (social and ideological) conditions with which women of this period generally had to contend.

Students list normative or expected behaviors of courtly women and comment on the social and sexual mores of the *A Knight's Tale's* female protagonist, Lady Jocelyn. The class observes that Jocelyn comports herself in a manner starkly at odds with that stipulated by norms of the times as evidenced in the admonitions of de Pisan. Subsequently, two conflicting loci of discussion emerge. On the one hand, some students suggest that Jocelyn's unorthodox behavior further evidences the film's lack of historical veracity, while some inquire about the extent to which—and the regularity with which—individuals could or might have contested and flouted these norms. Thus, the class debates the nature and extent of structure and agency. This debate is apposite as I frame the late-medieval section of the course in terms of crises characteristic of that period. In discussions of *The Navigator*, I give special attention to the Bubonic Plague, while we examine gender and religious beliefs in *Joan of Arc: The Messenger*. In a

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<sup>17</sup> John P. McKay, Bennett D. Hill, and John Buckler, *A History of Western Society: Volume B From the Renaissance to 1815*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003). Students responded well to this text when I used it previously in a now defunct freshman course on Western Civilization.

<sup>18</sup> McKay et al., 412-13.

discussion of *A Knight's Tale* I am keen for students to locate and explicate the smaller stories of the film's characters within larger patterns of historical change and meaning. From lectures and reading students are aware that historians have long seen the late Middle Ages as a period in which the feudal social, economic, and intellectual order was breaking down to be replaced by a more modern culture characterized by capitalism, urbanization, and individualism. Students are encouraged to interpret the sexual liberty and forwardness of the noblewoman Jocelyn and the commoner Will Thatcher's desire for upward social and economic mobility as historically probably instances of, or responses to, these well-attested structural changes.

Popular historical film need not be used solely as a means of generating and maintaining students' interest in the past. Such films offer unique and accessible means of introducing students to key theoretical and historiographical concepts: constructivism, narrativism, structure, and agency. These are concepts with which all history students should and can grapple.

Note: My thinking on the nature of historical film is heavily indebted to numerous discussions I have enjoyed with Bronwyn Labrum, Luke McKeown, and Gita Rao.



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

### National Archives Announces DocsTeach, a New Online Tool for Teachers

Just in time for the start of a new school year, the National Archives announces the launch of [www.DocsTeach.org](http://www.DocsTeach.org), a new online tool for teaching with documents.

"DocsTeach.org is a significant and welcome addition to our popular education programs," said Archivist of the United States David S. Ferriero. "It will engage teachers and students in new ways and stir their interest in history through the use of original documents in the National Archives. It is also consistent with our goals to make as much of our holdings available to the public as easily as possible.

DocsTeach combines primary source content with the latest interactive capabilities of the Internet in ways that teachers who have pilot-tested the site are calling "brilliant!"

Not only does the site invite educators to explore thousands of documents in a variety of media from the holdings of the National Archives—items such as George Washington's draft of the Constitution, the cancelled check for Alaska, Chuck Yeager's notes on the first supersonic flight, and President Richard Nixon's resignation letter—but it also allows teachers to combine these materials using clever tools to create engaging activities that students can access online.

The seven tools featured on the site are designed to teach specific historical thinking skills—weighing evidence, interpreting data, focusing on details, and more. Each employs interactive components including puzzles, scales, maps, flow charts, and others that both teachers and students can tailor to their needs.

On the site, teachers can 1) browse or search for documents and activities, 2) customize any activity to fit the needs of a unique classroom, 3) create a brand new activity with its own web address from scratch, using one of seven distinctive tools., and 4) save and organize activities in an account to share with students. After participating in an activity, the site even allows students to submit their work to their teacher via e-mail.

Typical online educational tools are prescriptive—they provide a specified set of activities on a single subject. Any interactivity is usually separated from the lesson plan which takes the form of an article or essay. DocsTeach is revolutionary because the interactive *is* the lesson; teachers can create lessons from scratch, adapt lessons from others, or even let their students create the lessons; and a single suite of tools can be applied to a broad range of subjects and skill levels.

For more than three decades, the National Archives has provided educators with methods and materials for teaching with documents. Working in partnership with the Foundation for the National Archives and Second Story Interactive, DocsTeach is the latest component in this program that advances the National Archives ability to meet its strategic goal of improving civic literacy. The National Archives is not just "providing" methods and material anymore. Now, the agency is reflecting the philosophy of open government, encouraging educators to participate, create, and share.

DocsTeach is proudly brought to you by the Foundation for the National Archives, with the generous support of Texas Instruments.

Note: In the spring 2011 issue of *Teaching History*, Michael Hussey of the NARA staff will provide more information on DocsTeach and suggest in more detail a variety of ways to utilize the website. He will introduce and describe sample lesson plans developed by the Archives education team and templates for teachers to create their own activities or modify NARA-designed plans and those suggested by other teachers.

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Christopher Tyerman. *God's War: A New History of the Crusades*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. Pp. 1024. Paper, \$22.95; ISBN 978-0-674-03070-1.**

"Deus lo Vult!" or "God wills it!" was the call from Pope Urban II to all Christians to crusade to free the Holy Land from the clutches of Islam. *God's War* by Christopher Tyerman, a Lecturer of Medieval History at Hertford College and New College, University of Oxford, is an in-depth look into the events of the Crusades. His writing is thorough when it comes to covering the Crusades which span nearly two hundred years from beginning to end. The book is perhaps too thorough when referencing Crusade leaders and soldiers; this is trivia that the reader neither needs to know about nor should really care about. Introducing dozens and dozens of obscure soldiers slows down the book and does not encourage the reader to continue to learn and experience an important era of Western history. The Crusades covered every experience of the human condition, yet somehow Tyerman turns it into an insurance lecture full of charts, graphs, and political analyses sure to put even the most interested reader to sleep.

Yet, not all is lost on this book. Tyerman provides a detailed history of the Crusades that many might not know about or even realize could be considered part of the Crusades. The reader observes that the goal of the Crusades evolves from the goal of liberating the Holy Land from Islam to broadly going after all of the enemies of Christianity, the heretics. The typically ignored Albigensian Crusades are addressed, where French nobles in southern France offered protection to the Cathars, Pure Ones, or Albigensians, a heretical movement. The nobles wanted to keep the Pope and the King of France out of their affairs. These nobles saw the Albigensians being more Christian than the Catholic Church. Albigensian missionaries were pious men living moral lives compared to the underhanded Catholic bishops of southern France. The Albigensians accused the Catholic Church of being in league with the devil and much of the population of southern France agreed. The Pope ordered the crusade in 1209 with support coming from the King of France who wanted to regain control of his country and crush those nobles challenging his power. By 1229, the Albigensians and their supporters were defeated. This challenge to the Church helped lead to the establishment of the Dominican Order and the Medieval Inquisition.

If the reader can work through all of the minutiae that Tyerman included, the importance of the book can be found and used in the classroom. The Crusades continued running battles between East and West that started with the Greeks and the Persians. It evolved into a battle between Christianity and Islam that is still affecting the world today. Shortly after the attacks on September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush said, "This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while." Those words awakened old memories in the Islamic world, forgotten for nearly a thousand years. Tyerman's book allows the student to see where that anger comes from.

Jeffrey D. Burson. *The Rise and Fall of Theological Enlightenment: Jean-Marin de Prades and Ideological Polarization in Eighteenth-Century France*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010. Pp. 520. Cloth, \$55.00; ISBN 978-0-268-02220-4.

The intellectual, political, and religious upheavals of eighteenth-century France swept up individuals into maelstroms that carried them to fame or destroyed their lives. Such was the case with an otherwise little known theology student named Jean-Martin de Prades. Jeffrey Burson explores the controversy and political intrigue surrounding Prades' thesis, presented to the Sorbonne, as a telling event in the battle for the Gallican Church during the Enlightenment.

Burson, assistant professor of history at Macon State College, uses the Prades episode to demonstrate the conflicts between various intellectual parties struggling for control of French religious and philosophical thought. Burson argues that French Jesuits had created a synthesis of the ideas of Locke and Malebranche—a synthesis Burson calls the “Theological Enlightenment.” An ongoing struggle arose involving the Jansenists, the Jesuit synthesis, and the emerging Radical Enlightenment. Prades' thesis, intended as a first effort in the creation of an apologetic in defense of the Church in the face of Enlightenment philosophy, became a point of conflict over the role of the Sorbonne and its faculty within that struggle. Prades fell victim to the politics of the theological and political parties involved in the debates.

Burson's study uses Prades and his thesis in much the same way: as a symbol of the controversy. This book does an excellent job of introducing and analyzing the position of each group and the larger sociopolitical context. While on the surface about the Prades affair, this book is an overview of the intellectual turmoil that was mid-eighteenth-century France. Burson has studied the primary documents and recreates the events and their context with meticulous detail.

The book is presented in three parts. The first part surveys the religious and intellectual movements of the first half of the century and the development of the Theological Enlightenment. Part two describes the milieu of higher education in Paris at mid-century—both the structure of higher education and the politics of the period. The final part examines Prades' thesis in detail and the unfolding of the events leading to its condemnation.

For Burson, the Prades affair signals the collapse of the Theological Enlightenment in France, the end of the political autonomy of the Sorbonne, and left France polarized between the secular Enlightenment and a conservative Counter-Enlightenment. Burson's work reflects careful examination of the archival evidence, a thorough familiarity with the scholarly analysis of the relevant material preceding his study, a comprehensive presentation of the evidence, and a well-structured argument.

This volume would serve well as a secondary or recommended text in a graduate-level course. The detailed nature of the subject matter, the complexity of the information presented, and the writing style are too advanced for undergraduates but

should fit well into a graduate-level seminar. Because of the rich overview provided of the larger context, this book is an excellent resource for research projects involving the French Church, the Enlightenment, the political circumstances of pre-Revolutionary France, and eighteenth-century higher education. Instructors will be able to mine the book for numerous details and illustrations for course use.

Alamance Community College

Perry Hardison

**Christopher R. Leahey.** *Whitewashing War: Historical Myth, Corporate Textbooks, and Possibilities for Democratic Education.* New York: Teachers College Press, 2010. Pp. 160. Paperback, \$22.95; ISBN 978-0-8077-5004-5.

No one who reads this study will have any difficulty identifying its thesis. The reader discovers it at the outset of the book and the author sustains it constantly to the end. In fact, Leahey presents his conclusion at the very beginning, giving the appearance of both a polemical and one-sided investigation. *Whitewashing War* asserts that public social studies education in American schools is influenced and controlled by forces such as the government, the military, the industrial establishment, and the media. Through federal action, military involvement, textbook sanitization, and media omissions the effort is to indoctrinate students with patriotism and loyalty, thus insuring a passive, obedient response. While this point of view is not without merit, in its ideological presentation it savors too much of a dictum rather than a matter for discussion.

Leahey develops this idea by keying in on a number of recent incidents. First is the 1995 exhibit at the Smithsonian that dealt with the dropping of the atomic bomb. Many in the government, military, and press condemned it as giving too much weight to Japanese suffering and, as a result, the exhibit was largely modified. The second was the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which, Leahey argues, came from an event that was provoked by the Johnson administration to justify the Vietnam War. Lastly, he cites the Tet offensive, which, he argues, was really the consequence of military incompetence and the way in which the My Lai massacre was hidden and explained away.

There is some truth in what the author has to say, but his conclusion, based primarily on American or world history textbooks, that public classrooms are places where students get inculcated and indoctrinated with patriotism, goes too far. For, as Leahey notes, but only in the last chapter and appendix, there are other components of the classroom experience that elucidate and supplement the text. For example, some teachers can utilize their skills to add breadth to the text and modify its positions. Some educators might become, or be forced to become, lapdogs of the text. But most can discriminate, for instance, by eliminating sections of the text that are not necessary or germane. In addition, the instructor can guide students through the text, use questions

at the end as a basis for discussion, and make reference to sidebars that many textbooks include.

In addition, a number of well-chosen readers provide a variety of sources, giving students the opportunity to see first-hand documents on a specific issue. There are also readers that contain a series of articles taking different views of an event. Such supplements meet the need of ensuring that one is exposed to every aspect of a problem. Moreover, films and videos can accomplish a similar purpose.

Consequently, while Christopher Leahey directs attention to the ways in which social studies are influenced by a number of external sources, each having the objective of control, his conclusions greatly overestimate the effect all of this has on the classroom. One might ask, for example, why so many students exposed to these attempts turned out to be the demonstrators and protestors of the future.

University of New Hampshire

Marc L. Schwarz

**Stephen Tuck. *We Ain't What We Ought To Be: The Black Freedom Struggle from Emancipation to Obama*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2010. Pp. 528. Cloth, \$19.95; ISBN 978-0-674-03626-0.**

Stephen Tuck weaves a new tapestry of the African-American freedom struggle from emancipation to the twenty-first century by adding unfamiliar voices to the expected chorus. The voices are demanding freedom in many different ways—the sheer diversity threatens to explode into many disparate fragments. But the song of freedom is held together by Tuck's organizing skills. His main point is that a continuous line of resistance linked the emancipation era to the twenty-first century, with activism, individual and organized, as a hallmark of each generation. The book focuses on the difficulty and uncertainty of the struggle. Like a pendulum, small advances are accompanied by swift backlashes of violence and indifference. With each triumph, the reader braces for the expected brutal backlash and it follows in due course. Yet the direction of the struggle is forward.

Written in a fast-paced and provocative style, each chapter begins with savory tidbits of incidents that whet the appetite for what the chapter will expand upon. Varying in scope and their impact on society, some incidents are local, others portend national importance, and some are familiar but most are not. Although there is a slight dissonance in this mixture, the result is a panorama of events that provide a clearer picture of the era.

The book is packed with anecdotal ironies that make for great storytelling and might help students remember the issues they represent. Tuck looks closely at the leaders on both sides of the divide, adding just enough detail to make them appear imperfectly human. His interpretation of some activists, like a Black Panther co-founder, seems sensationalized to provoke spirited debate: "movie star handsome [Huey] Newton went to law school hoping to become a better criminal." Students will

be hard-pressed to call this history text boring. The text is extensively researched with primary and secondary sources and includes an impressive collection of endnotes.

In the second half of a United States history course this would be an excellent supplemental textbook. Each of the eleven chapters covers a significant era that coincides with most U.S. texts. This wide-ranging narrative includes humility and humor, born of extraordinary circumstances, unlikely heroes, self-deprecating insight, and ungainly adversaries. But there is also unflinching brutality that displays the ferocious battles for power that spanned decades. These facts, along with an almost conversational tone, make captivating reading for undergraduates.

The volume's major strength is the massive collection of personal stories imbedded in the text. Peppered with the voices of everyday people, these stories reflect the courage and defiance of people who refuse to swallow the bitter pill of subordination and exploitation. They also mirror faith in the country's potential. Another plus are the continual references to popular culture. Noting literature, film, music, and popular opinion polls, this is a great reference for lectures and PowerPoint presentations. The broad scope and diverse themes also allow educators to select sections that conform to their syllabi. Tuck has not written a revisionist history so much as offered a clearer perspective on the struggle for African-American rights.

Georgia Highlands College

Barbara A. Moss

**D. Lynn McRainey and John Russick, eds. *Connecting Kids to History with Museum Exhibitions*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2010. Pp. 334. Paper, \$34.95; ISBN 978-59874-383-8.**

The key to this wonderful new text on teaching history is defined by the authors' adherence to one basic principle—that "play and fun" are the motivating factors in all learning. Simply, if individuals love what they are doing, they will learn. With this practical advice in mind, the editors illustrate how teaching, especially with young people, can and should occur outside the classroom door. Told through a collection of highly accessible essays, the readers learn in both practical and theoretical terms how to use a museum to its optimum advantage. The authors, like others, want to demonstrate how "museums designed with kids in mind" can engage young people in learning something more than just historical people, places, and things. Divided into three essential sections—"Valuing Kids," "Connecting Kids to History," and "Creating History Exhibitions for Kids"—this is a user-friendly text for anyone who works with young people. The key, as they say, is to allow students to become immersed in hands-on activities—and what better place to start than at a museum?

What I like most about this anthology is the editors' insistence that young people be called "kids." The fact that they do is self-evident of how passionate they are about treating young people with a deference often reserved for the very young. From the opening section on the importance of "valuing kids" to a discussion on the concept of

“play” and how “kids” learn best when they are having fun, the reader is taken on a journey of self-discovery and educational enlightenment. In particular, the authors drive the reader to examine time-honored assumptions about teaching and learning in light of what we know today about human development, cognitive learning, and developmental frameworks. By centering this work on what we know about kids and their learning, the authors call into question much of what happens in schools—rote memorization and standardized test preparation. Thus, each essay, written by distinguished educators and museum professionals, provides a multitude of suggestions for connecting young people to history by making “student-centered” activities and exhibits, whether at museums or in their classrooms, the centerpiece of a visionary ideal for optimum learning.

As each essayist says in his or her own style and voice, learning is not the accumulation of facts, but immersion in an experience whereby learners embody their learned knowledge as a living example of what they know and more importantly come to believe. These sharp educators and museum curators tell us repeatedly that for students (or kids) truly to learn they must “own their subject matter.” They must develop a genuine affection for their learning and, even with something as esoteric as history, personal ownership will most likely come with personal immersion. To paraphrase the authors, “fun begets learning and learning begets understanding.” Not just for history buffs, this multi-dimensional edited collection will resonate with teachers, curators, and parents who know that learning by doing is the opening to smart instruction. This good book shows us how.

University of Central Florida, Orlando

Jeffrey S. Kaplan

**Conal Furay and Michael J. Salevouris. *The Methods and Skills of History: A Practical Guide*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2010. Pp. 282. Paper, \$26.95; ISBN 978-0-88295-272-7.**

Conal Furay and Michael Salevouris attempt in *The Methods and Skills of History* to address an important problem in contemporary education: that students lack historical literacy. Their aim is to provide students with the tools to begin to “think historically.” Each of the fourteen chapters addresses a specific element within the field of history that is necessary for students to understand in order to do the work of historians. The authors begin each chapter with an introductory essay, followed by a series of exercises designed for students to practice the skills of history discussed in the chapter. Thus, the excellent organization of the book lends itself to teaching the skills of history as a process that students can manage through incremental steps. The first five chapters cover historical thinking, focusing on everything from causality to historical context. Several chapters on how historians conduct research, both primary and secondary, provide students with an understanding of how historians “do” history.

The final two chapters on historiography help students know better how the discipline of history operates.

The essays at the beginning of each chapter do a nice job of introducing students to the different elements within the field of history. The authors, however, face a serious challenge: making abstract concepts such as "sensitivity to context" understandable to undergraduates. Although the authors intend their essays to be "meaningful" to students, most of the essays tend to be dry and might only be able to hold the attention of the most passionate history majors. The exercises, though, are the least appealing aspect of the book for students. They focus far more on teaching the skills of history rather than inspiring interest in history. For example, in one exercise on historical context, students are provided with a description of an event (Oliver Cromwell's massacres of Wexford and Drogheda) and then five separate passages meant to provide additional historical context for the event. In the exercise, students are asked to write what specific pieces of information from each passage provide further understanding of the massacres by broadening the context. While the exercise will enable students to understand the importance of historical context, many students might see the exercises as busy work and be turned off.

The problem with the exercises is actually a larger problem with the book in that it would be difficult to use as a supplementary text for content-based courses. The examples discussed in the introductory essays and the exercises are mostly related to topics in both European and American history. The authors might have done this intentionally so the book could be used in both European and American history courses. However, there are so few examples and exercises related to any one period in European or American history that it would be difficult to incorporate the book into a content course. In this respect, the book appears best suited for courses in Historical Method, where it can be assumed students already have a background in both European and American history, and thus the exercises can be presented as a review of familiar material.

Medaille College

Daniel P. Kotzin

**John P. Kaminski.** *The Great Virginia Triumvirate: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson & James Madison in the Eyes of Their Contemporaries.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010. Pp. 264. Cloth, \$27.95; ISBN 978-0-8139-2876-0.

John Kaminski has dedicated his career to studies of the Founding Fathers. In the process, he has collected a large database that he tentatively calls "The Founders on the Founders," a collection of contemporary descriptions and opinions voiced about the revolutionary elite. Many items come from little known newspaper and manuscript sources. Kaminski's subjects are three leaders seen through the eyes of contemporaries. His intent is to reawaken public interest in the first Virginia Presidents. Although he



calls them a triumvirate, he shows they actually engaged in a shifting series of partnerships during their political careers.

Kaminski's approach is to discuss a series of specific topics about each man, presenting fifteen to twenty short essays in each of the three chapters. Convictions and personal character predominate. Reading tastes, religious opinions, and the balance between private and public life receive special attention. Kaminski is particularly interested in the decisions that led each man periodically to enter, and then retire from, the affairs of state. Central to the study is the meaning of republicanism in the Revolutionary era. Threats, threat perceptions, societal obligations, and the mobilization of public support often assume center stage. The author is more interested in providing springboards for discussion than in offering neatly structured answers. He has a clear preference for topics that have received comparatively little attention from historians. The discussions of the content of Washington's library and the management of Madison's plantation are good examples.

Kaminski indicates that he hopes teachers will make use of this volume, both to explore the early American Republic and to gain a better understanding of the use of primary source materials. He is careful to include documentary treatments that permit comparison and contrast among the three men. Their attitudes toward slavery, both upon their own plantations and in the larger society, are carefully structured for this purpose. So are the sections of each chapter that deal with the subject's use of the sources and opinions of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Kaminski is also careful to offer a range of contemporary opinions about each man, inviting readers to judge and evaluate the quality and purpose of contemporary discourse.

The author's selectivity might post some classroom problems. He offers brief and effective summaries of some background issues but is silent on others. Washington's victory at Yorktown and Madison's Presidential years are examples of topics you will need to send students to the library or the Internet to develop. Perhaps most significant is the Virginia context. Readers will leave with a good idea of what plantation life was like but probably will be stretched to place the tiny plantation elite within the burgeoning democracy of the new republic. Resolving such challenges might prove exciting classroom exercises.

Butler University

George W. Geib

**Tim Lehman.** *Bloodshed at Little Bighorn: Sitting Bull, Custer, and the Destinies of Nations.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010. Pp. 240. Paper, \$19.95; ISBN 978-0-8018-9501-2.

Lehman's new book on the most famous battle in the American West is a useful and extremely readable narrative of Custer's defeat and a fine introduction to the long conflict between the expansionist United States and the native tribes of the Great Plains. *Bloodshed at Little Bighorn* is a concise, clearly written account that deftly traces the

history of the long series of clashes that led up to this battle. This engaging monograph is ideal for use in undergraduate classrooms, as the author provides gracefully crafted portraits of important characters and reviews important ideas, from American military strategy to the importance of the horse for Plains tribes. Non-specialists will find that Lehman's book is a fine summary of the final American conquest of the American West. While it includes no new interpretation and relies heavily on secondary sources, it provides a balanced, fast-paced history ideal for use in survey courses on the West, Native America, or the nineteenth-century United States. It is also a good source for material for anyone writing or revising lectures on the subject.

The story begins in 1854, when a young Lakota warrior butchered a cow straggling behind a Mormon wagon train on the Oregon Trail. Soldiers set out from Fort Laramie in Wyoming to capture the offender. Despite attempts at compromise, American troops opened fire without provocation. They were wiped out in retaliation. The incident sparked more than two decades of warfare—the Great Sioux War—which culminated in the Battle of the Little Big Horn in June 1876. As American settlers moved into Minnesota, Colorado, and eventually South Dakota, tensions rose. The Fort Laramie treaty of 1868 brought temporary peace, but conflicts over buffalo hunting, the westward expansion of the railroad, and an American lust for gold made conflict inevitable.

In the 1860s George Armstrong Custer made his reputation as the nation's premier Indian fighter. He led an expedition into the Black Hills in 1874 that proclaimed the region the "El Dorado of America." The Sioux refused orders to abandon the sacred Black Hills—also an important hunting area—by January 1876. In June, Custer recklessly went to his death. The American defeat led to a campaign of vengeance in 1876 and 1877 that involved thousands of soldiers in one of the largest military operations of the late nineteenth century. Sioux and Cheyenne survivors, hungry and freezing, were forced onto reservations within a year of Custer's defeat.

The final chapter reviews the mythology of the battle and the creation—and eventual rethinking—of the heroic legend of the Seventh Cavalry. Custer quickly became a national hero, but Sitting Bull also gained status as a worthy adversary. However, Custer's reputation evolved over time and he became a villain in the 1972 movie *Little Big Man*. The battlefield itself was also a contested place in American public memory, with Custer's name deleted in favor of Little Big Horn Battlefield National Monument and a more inclusive multicultural history. Lehman's brief work does justice to this complex story and its enduring legacy in American culture.



