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Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts

The choice between the two seemed absurd but this was exactly what the debate about national history standards had become. "George Washington or Bart Simpson," asked Senator Slade Gorton (R-Wash.) during the 1995 Congressional debates on this subject: Which figure represents a "more important part of our Nation's history for our children to study?"[1] To Gorton, the proposed national standards represented a frontal attack on American civilization, an "ideologically driven anti-Western monument to politically correct caricature."[2] The Senate, in apparent agreement, rejected the standards 99–1.

The standards' architects did not take this rejection lying down. Gary Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross Dunn, the team largely responsible for collating the reports of many panels and committees, issued a 318-page rebuttal packed with refutations of Gorton, his chief sponsor, Lynne Cheney, then chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and their various conservative allies—many of them op-ed columnists and radio talk show hosts. Gorton was right, Nash and his colleagues admitted, in claiming that no standard *explicitly* named George Washington as the first president. But this was a mere technicality. The standards asked students "to examine major issues confronting the young country during [Washington's] presidency," and there was more material on

Washington as the "father of our country" in the standards for grades K–4.[3] To counter Cheney's claim that Americans such as Robert E. Lee or the Wright Brothers were expunged because they had the misfortune of being dead, white, and male, Nash and colleagues added up the names of people fitting this description—more than 700 in all—and announced that this was "many times the grand total of all women, African-Americans, Latinos, and Indians individually named."[4]

Similar exercises in tit for tat quickly became standard in the debate over standards. But just below the surface, name counts took on an uglier face: Each side felt it necessary to impute to the other the basest of motives. So, to Bob Dole, the Republican presidential candidate in 1996, the national standards were the handiwork of people "worse than external enemies."[5] To Nash's team, critics of the proposed standards were driven by latent fears over a diverse America in which the "new faces [that] crowd[ed] onto the stage of history ruin the symmetry and security of older versions of the past."[6] In the barroom terms befitting such a brawl, those who wrote the standards were traitors; those who opposed them, racists.

The rancor of this debate was rich soil for dichotomous thinking. Take, for example, the forum organized by the journal *American Scholar*, the official publication of the national honorary society Phi Beta Kappa. *American Scholar* asked eleven prominent historians to write a thousand words in response to the question, "What history should our children learn?" Should children learn "the patriotism, heroism, and ideals of the nation" or "the injustices, defeats, and hypocrisies of its leaders and dominant classes"? In case panelists didn't get the point, they were also asked whether the United States represented "one of the great historical success stories" or "the story of one opportunity after another lost"?[7] Fortunately, sanity prevailed. Yale's Edmund Morgan, author of the *Stamp Act Crisis* and thus no newcomer to the topic of propaganda, noted that any answer would necessarily "look more like slogans than any reasoned approach to history," adding, wryly, that he didn't need "a thousand words to say it."[8]

Given the tenor of the debate, some might wonder why history was ever considered a part of the humanities, one of those disciplines that are supposed to teach us to spurn sloganeering, tolerate complexity, and cherish nuance. Writing at the turn of the century, Woodrow Wilson and other members of the Committee of Ten noted that history went well beyond particular stories and names to achieve its highest aim by

endowing us with "the invaluable mental power which we call judgment."[9] Sadly, the present debate has become so fixated on the question of "which history" that we have forgotten a more basic question: Why study history at all?

The answer to this neglected question is hardly self-evident. Americans have never been fully convinced of history's place in the curriculum. History education may be riding a momentary crest of interest, but its roots do not run deep. Many states set minimal requirements for the study of history. Schools of education offer future teachers courses in the teaching of mathematics, the teaching of science, and the teaching of literature, but we would be hard-pressed to find more than a handful of courses in the *entire* nation devoted to the teaching of history. History is getting a lot of airtime in national policy debates, but in the places that matter most—the schools where kids learn and the colleges where teachers are taught—history's status is anything but secure.

In this chapter my focus is not on which history is better—that of the victors, the vanquished, or some Solomonic combination of both. Rather, I take several steps back from the current History Wars to ponder another question: What is history good for? Why even teach it in schools? My claim in a nutshell is that history holds the potential, only partly realized, of humanizing us in ways offered by few other areas in the school curriculum. I make no claim of originality in arguing this point of view. But each generation must ask itself anew why studying the past is important, and remind itself why history can bring us together rather than—as we have seen most recently—tear us apart.

The argument I make pivots on a tension that underlies every encounter with the past: the tension between the familiar and the strange, between feelings of proximity and feelings of distance in relation to the people we seek to understand. Neither of these extremes does justice to history's complexity, and veering to one side or the other dulls history's jagged edges and leaves us with cliché and caricature. Achieving mature historical thought depends precisely on our ability to navigate the uneven landscape of history, to traverse the rugged terrain that lies between the poles of familiarity and distance from the past.

The pole of familiarity pulls most strongly. The familiar past entices us with the promise that we can locate our own place in the stream of time and solidify our identity in the present. By tying our own stories to those who have come before us, the past becomes a useful resource in our everyday life, an endless storehouse of raw materials to be shaped

or bent to meet our present needs. Situating ourselves in time is a basic human need. Indeed, it is impossible to conceptualize life on the planet without doing so.

But in viewing the past as usable, something that speaks to us without intermediary or translation, we end up turning it into yet another commodity for instant consumption. We discard or just ignore vast regions of the past that either contradict our current needs or fail to align tidily with them. The usable past retains a certain fascination, but it is the fascination of the flea market, with its endless array of gaudy trinkets and antique baubles. Because we more or less know what we are looking for before we enter this past, our encounter is unlikely to change us or cause us to rethink who we are. The past becomes clay in our hands. We are not called upon to stretch our understanding to learn from the past. Instead, we contort the past to fit the predetermined meanings we have already assigned it.

The other pole in this tension, the strangeness of the past, offers the possibility of surprise and amazement, of encountering people, places, and times that spur us to reconsider how we conceptualize ourselves as human beings. An encounter with this past can be mind-expanding in the best sense of the term. Yet, taken to extremes, this approach carries its own problems. The past "on its own terms," detached from the circumstances, concerns, and needs of the present, too often results in a kind of esoteric exoticism, precisely the impression one comes to after a tour through the monographic literature that defines contemporary historical practice. Much of this specialized literature may engage the attention of a small coterie of professionals, but it fails to engage the interest of anyone else.[10]

There is no easy way around the tension between the familiar past, which seems so relevant to our present needs, and the strange and inaccessible past, whose applicability is not immediately manifest. The tension exists because both aspects of history are essential and irreducible. On the one hand, we need to feel kinship with the people we study, for this is exactly what engages our interest and makes us feel connected. We come to see ourselves as inheritors of a tradition that provides mooring and security against the transience of the modern world.

But this is only half the story. To realize history's humanizing qualities fully, to draw on history's ability to, in the words of Carl Degler, "expand our conception and understanding of what it means to be human,"[11] we need to encounter the distant past—a past less distant

from us in time than in its modes of thought and social organization. It is this past, one that initially leaves us befuddled or, worse, just plain bored, that we need most if we are to achieve the understanding that each of us is more than the handful of labels ascribed to us at birth. The sustained encounter with this less-familiar past teaches us the limitations of our brief sojourn on the planet and allows us to take membership in the entire human race. Paradoxically, the relevance of the past may lie precisely in what strikes us as its initial irrelevance.

I approach these issues not as a historian, someone who spends time using documents to reconstruct the past, but as a psychologist, someone who designs tasks and interviews that shed light on how we come to know who we are. Similarly, my data are not found in archives but are created when I sit down to interview people from all walks of life—teachers, practicing historians, high school kids, and parents. In the following three vignettes, I offer glimpses from this program of research. The first comes from a high school student's encounter with primary documents from the Revolutionary War; the second, from an elementary school principal's reactions after reading the diary of a midwife from the turn of the nineteenth century; and the third, from a historian's encounter with documents that shed light on Abraham Lincoln's views on race.

In these vignettes, I try to show that historical thinking, in its deepest forms, is neither a natural process nor something that springs automatically from psychological development. Its achievement, I argue, actually goes against the grain of how we ordinarily think, one of the reasons why it is much easier to learn names, dates, and stories than it is to change the basic mental structures we use to grasp the meaning of the past. The odds of achieving mature historical understanding are stacked against us in a world in which Disney and MTV call the shots. But it is precisely the uses to which the past is put that endow these other aims with even greater importance.

THE UNBRIDGEABLE RUBICON

Let me begin with Derek, a seventeen-year-old Advanced Placement history student (and later the salutatorian of his senior class), who participated in one of my earliest studies. I remember Derek clearly because it was in working with him that the questions I take up here first came into view.[12]

Derek participated in a study in which high school students (as well as professional historians) read a series of primary sources about the Battle of Lexington. Derek read that British forces encountered the minutemen standing in their way on Lexington Green. He remarked on the unequal numbers of the combatants—something on the order of hundreds of British regulars opposed seventy or so colonists, according to the documents. He noted that when the encounter was over, eight colonists lay dead, while there was only one casualty on the British side. This suggested to him that the engagement might have been more one-sided than the term "battle" suggests. These were astute observations that reflected Derek's keen intelligence and made him stand out among his peers. However, when asked to select the picture that best reflected the written evidence he had reviewed, Derek did not choose the one that showed the colonists in disarray, which would have been the logical choice given his earlier observations. Instead, he chose the picture that showed the colonists hiding behind walls, reloading their muskets, and taking aim at the Redcoats. Derek believed that this depiction was the most accurate because

> it gives [the minutemen] sort of . . . an advantageous position, where they are sort of on a hill and I presume somewhere over here is a wall I guess. . . . The minutemen are going to be all scrambled, going to be hiding behind the poles and everything, rather than staying out here facing [the British]. . . . You know there's got to be like a hill, and they're thinking they got to hide behind something, get at a place where they can't be shot besides being on low ground, and being ready to kill. Their mentalities would be ludicrous if they were going to stand, like, here in [the depiction showing the minutemen in disarray], ready to be shot.[13]

Judged by conventional definitions of what we want kids to do in history classrooms, Derek's reading is exemplary. In the words of the Bradley Commission, the report that launched the current reform movement in history education, students should enter "into a world of drama—suspending [their] knowledge of the ending in order to gain a sense of another era—a sense of empathy that allows the student to see through the eyes of the people who were there."[14] Derek has not only tried to see through others' eyes; he has attempted a reconstruction of their world views, their "*mentalités*." However, Derek's reconstruction holds true only if these people shared his own modern notions of battlefield propriety: the idea that in the face of a stronger adversary, you flee behind walls and wage guerrilla warfare. Derek's reading poses a striking irony. What

seemed to guide his view of this event is a set of assumptions about how normal people behave. These assumptions, in turn, overshadowed his very own observations, made during the review of the written testimony. Ironically, what Derek perceived as natural was perceived as beastly by the Puritans when they first encountered this form of combat. By the sixteenth century, European warfare had evolved into a highly complex form of gentlemanly encounter: It was not unheard of for combatants to wage war during the day and dine together at night. Battlefield engagements conformed to an elaborate etiquette, in part the result of the cumbersome sequence of actions—up to forty-two separate steps—involved in firing and reloading a musket.[15]

The culture of large-scale warfare clashed with the mores of the indigenous peoples the Puritans encountered along the New England coast. Among the Pequots, for example, a military culture of symbolic acts prevailed. The norm was not face-to-face encounters with massive bloodshed, but small-scale raids that settled feuds by exacting symbolic tribute. This clash in traditions led to ruinous confrontations, as when the Puritans encircled the entire Indian village at the Mystic River in 1637 and burned it to the ground. Solomon Stoddard, writing to Joseph Dudley in 1703, explained:

> If the Indians were as other people are, and did manage their warr fairly after the manner of other nations, it might be looked upon as inhumane to persue them in a manner contrary to Christian practice. . . . But they are to be looked upon as thieves and murderers. . . they don't appeare openly in the field to bid us battle, they use those cruelly that fall into their hands. . . . They act like wolves and are to be dealt with as wolves.[16]

It is not that Derek was a careless reader. On the contrary, his reading was fluent, and his skill at monitoring his own cognition (what psychologists call "metacognition") was enviable. But when all was said and done, Derek's encounter with these eighteenth-century documents left him unfazed. The colonists' behavior did not cause him to stand back and say, "Wow, what a strange group of people. What on earth would make them act this way?" Such a reaction might lead him to contemplate codes of behavior—duty, honor, dying for a cause—foreign to his world. These documents did not spur Derek to ask himself new questions or consider new dimensions of human experience. Instead, his existing beliefs shaped the information he encountered so that the new conformed to the shape of the already known. Derek read these documents but he learned little from them.

Derek's reading raises questions that lie at the heart of historical understanding. Given what we know about the entrenched nature of beliefs, how, exactly, do we bracket what we know in order to understand the thinking of people in the past? This is no easy task. The notion that we can strip ourselves of what we know, that we can stop the "spread of activation" set off when we read certain words, recalls Allan Megill's notion of hermeneutic naiveté, or the belief in "immaculate perception."[17] Among philosophers, Hans-Georg Gadamer has been the most instructive about the problems this position entails. How can we overcome established modes of thought, Gadamer asks, when it is these modes that permit understanding in the first place?[18] We, no less than the people we study, are historical beings. Trying to shed what we know in order to glimpse the "real" past is like trying to examine microbes with the naked eye: The instruments we abandon are the ones that enable us to see.

This position differs considerably from the classic historicist stance one finds in Robin Collingwood and others. For Collingwood, "all history is the history of thought," the ability of the historian to put him- or herself in Julius Caesar's mind, "envisioning . . . the situation in which Caesar stood, and thinking for himself what Caesar thought about the situation and the possible ways of dealing with it."[19] Collingwood believed that we can somehow "know Caesar" because human ways of thought, in some deep and essential way, transcend time and space.

Not so fast, say contemporary historians. Consider the words of Carlo Ginzburg, the eminent Italian historian and author of the best-selling *The Cheese and the Worms:*

> The historian's task is just the opposite of what most of us were taught to believe. He must destroy our false sense of proximity to people of the past because they come from societies very different from our own. The more we discover about these people's mental universes, the more we should be shocked by the cultural distance that separates us from them.[20]

Or these words from Robert Darnton, award-winning author of *The Great Cat Massacre:*

> Other people are other. They do not think the way we do. And if we want to understand their way of thinking we should set out with the idea of capturing otherness. . . . We constantly need to be shaken out of a false sense of familiarity with the past, to be administered doses of culture shock.[21]

Or these from Richard White, historian of the West:

> Any good history begins in strangeness. The past should not be comfortable. The past should not be a familiar echo of the present, for if it is familiar why revisit it? The past should be so strange that you wonder how you and people you know and love could come from such a time.[22]

In coming to understand how we differ from Caesar, can we ever "know" him in the way he knew himself or in the way contemporaries knew him? Even if we were convinced of the possibility, how would we know we had succeeded, short of appealing to necromancy? In other words, the point made by these contemporary historians seems to be the opposite of the one cited earlier—that the goal of historical understanding should be to "see through the eyes of the people who were there." If Ginzburg and others are right, the goal of historical study should be to teach us what we *cannot* see, to acquaint us with the congenital blurriness of our vision.

Even the notion that historical knowledge should serve as a bank of examples for contemplating present problems has come under challenge. The more we know about the past, claimed the philosopher of history Louis O. Mink, the more cautious we should be before drawing analogies to it. Historical knowledge in Mink's view can sever our connection to the past, making us see ourselves as discontinuous with the people we study. John Locke, for example, is no longer our contemporary by virtue of his seemingly "modern" understanding of government and human motivation. Instead, our awareness of discontinuity with Locke forces us to reconcile two contradictory forces: intellectual proximity with the Locke of the *Second Treatise on Government* and intellectual estrangement from the anti-empiricist Locke, author of the rarely read *Essay on the Reasonableness of Christianity.* In studying the Locke who fits our image as well as the Locke who complicates it, we can come to know a more nuanced personality. Locke becomes more than a projection of our own views. "The new Locke," writes Mink, "is accessible in his remoteness and strangeness; it is precisely his crotchety Calvinism which changes our understanding of all his views although it destroys the illusion that in political and philosophical discussion we are communing with Locke as with a contemporary."[23] Put differently, when we think about Egyptian drawing and representation of perspective, we can no longer "assume that the Egyptians saw as we see, but could not draw as we can."[24] Rather, we must consider the possibility that they drew differently because they *saw* differently, and that there is something about this way of seeing that is

irretrievably lost. Much as we try, then, we can never fully cross the Rubicon that flows between our mind and Caesar's.

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

How willing are we to press this point? Exactly when in the flow of human experience does last month become strange, last year remote? Indeed, when pushed to its extreme, the consequence of thinking that there is no continuity with the past is as grave an error as thinking that the past directly mirrors the present. David Lowenthal reminds us that the past is a "foreign country."[25] A foreign country, not a foreign planet. To replace naive historicism with a rigid sense of disconnection is to play mental musical chairs, to give up one reductionism only to adopt another.

Historical thinking requires us to reconcile two contradictory positions: first, that our established modes of thinking are an inheritance that cannot be sloughed off, and, second, that if we make no attempt to slough them off, we are doomed to a mind-numbing presentism that reads the present onto the past. It was precisely this paradox that drew me to Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's *A Midwife's Tale*, which narrates the story of Martha Ballard, a midwife who lived between 1735 and 1812. As Carl Degler wrote in his review of the book, Ulrich "unravels the fascinating life of a community that is so foreign, and yet so similar to our own."[26]

About the time I was reading this book, I was asked by a group of educators in Minnesota to develop a workshop on history as a "way of knowing," something beyond the compendia of names and dates that history had become in the course of that state's affair with "outcome-based education."[27] In the two days of this workshop, I chose to contrast learning history from books like Ulrich's with the approach most familiar to participants: learning history from history textbooks.

As vehicles for creating historical understanding, textbooks present intriguing challenges and create a set of problems all their own. Textbooks pivot on what Roland Barthes called the "referential illusion," the notion that the way things are told is simply the way things were.[28] To achieve this illusion, textbooks exploit various linguistic conventions. First, textbooks eliminate "metadiscourse," or the existence of places in the text where the author intrudes to indicate positionality and stance. Metadiscourse is common in the writing historians do for one another, but it is edited out of the writing they do for schoolchildren.[29] In addition, traces of how the text came to be are hidden or erased: Textbooks

rarely cite the documentary record; if primary material appears, it is typically set off in "sidebars" so as not to interfere with the main text. Finally, the textbook speaks in the omniscient third-person. No visible author confronts the reader; instead, a corporate author speaks from a position of transcendence, a position of knowing from on high.

I began the Minnesota seminar by giving the twenty-two participants a selection from Winthrop Jordan's *The Americans*, a widely used U.S. history textbook for the eleventh grade.[30] In describing the colonial economy during roughly the same period as Ballard's diary, Jordan focuses on "triangular trade," the nexus of routes involved in the exchange of slaves, sugar cane, and rum between the colonies, the West Indies, and Africa. The story is organized under the boldfaced heading "The North Develops Commerce and Cities—Molasses and Rumbullion," with women appearing in the story only in the section entitled "Family Farms." The following paragraph about the role of women in economic life became, for the next two days, the touchstone against which we assayed our own developing understanding and the text that, in the final hours of the workshop, we attempted to rewrite.

> Anyone who has ever lived on a family farm knows that such a life involves long hours and hard work for everyone. Children worked at least part time from the age when they could be shown how to shell peas, shuck corn, or fetch firewood. Women performed an unending round of tasks. They cooked in metal pots that were hung over the open fireplace. They baked in a hollow compartment in the chimney that served as an oven. They spun rough cloth and sewed it into clothing for the family. They washed clothes and bedding in wooden tubs with soap they made themselves.[31]

After examining this passage and the surrounding narrative, we turned to Ulrich's book. As a text for exploring historical thinking, this work offers multiple points of entry. Each chapter starts with several pages from Martha's diary, with eighteenth-century spelling and grammatical conventions intact. Only after giving the reader a feeling for the kinds of evidence she reviewed does Ulrich go on to explore themes and trends that spring from Martha's life. The following diary excerpt is representative of the kinds of materials participants studied:

> November 15 6 At Mr Parkers. Mrs Holdman here.
> Cloudy & Cold. Mrs Holdman here to have a gown made. Mrs Benjamin to have a Cloak Cut. Polly Rust after work. I was Calld to Mr Parkers aftern. Mr Ballard is better. . . .
> 17 F At ditoes & Mr Poores. Birth 47th a daughter. At Capt Meloys allso Rainy. I was called from Mr Parkers at 2 hour morn to Mr Poores.

> Doct Page was Calld before my arival. I Extracted the Child, a dagt. He Chose to Close the Loin. I returnd home at 8 hour morning. Receivd 6/ as a reward. Mr Ballard & Ephm attend worship, Dolly & Sally aftern. Charls and John Coks supt here. I was calld to Capt meloys at 11 hour Evening. Raind. Birth Mr Poores daughter X X[32]

Such excerpts formed one part of our inquiry. We also examined tables of delivery data compiled by Ulrich from Martha's diary, and compared these with statistics from Dr. James Farrington (1824–59), born a generation after Martha, when midwifery had fallen into disfavor and doctors had turned to bloodletting and the use of opium derivatives such as laudanum during delivery.[33] We puzzled over what seemed to be dramatic changes in how midwives were viewed, from the turn of the eighteenth century, when Martha stood beside doctors at an autopsy, to less than twenty years later, when a Harvard professor wrote that "we cannot instruct women as we do men in the science of medicine; we cannot carry them into the dissecting room . . . without destroying those moral qualities of character which are essential to the office" of midwife and woman.[34]

From correcting and expanding the initial textbook account, we ventured on to question the rarely articulated assumptions that guide the writing of textbooks. Such assumptions were thrown into relief when we placed the textbook alongside Ulrich's narrative. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich is present in the story she tells, sharing how she pieced together the labyrinthine social relationships of colonial New England from the haziest of references; how she immersed herself in the world of herbal medicine to decode cryptic allusions to traditional remedies; how, in order to understand the work of Martha's husband, Ephraim, she had to learn about the operation of sawmills in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

As we dove deeper into Martha's world and work, we could not help thinking about the world and work of the historian. We marveled at the author's steely resolve in the face of the persistent question: "When will the book be finished?"[35] We found it impossible to learn about Martha Ballard without learning about Laurel Thatcher Ulrich. It helped that the historian made no attempt to hide. In fact, Ulrich placed herself squarely in the text, as, for example, when she described how other historians found Martha's diary "trivial and unimportant." That such a view could come from men writing in the nineteenth century was, perhaps, understandable, but when a feminist history written in the 1970s characterized the diary as "filled with trivia," it was too much for Ulrich.

> It is in the very dailiness, the exhaustive, repetitious dailiness, that the real power of Martha Ballard's book lies. To extract the river crossing without noting the cold days spent "footing" stockings, to abstract the births without recording the long autumns spent winding quills, pickling meat, and sorting cabbages, is to destroy the sinews of this earnest, steady, gentle, and courageous record. . . . when [Martha] felt overwhelmed or enlivened by the very "trivia" the historians have dismissed, she said so, not in the soul-searching manner of a Puritan nor with the literary self-consciousness of a sentimentalist, but in a plain, matter-of-fact, and in the end unforgettable voice. For more than twenty-seven years, 9,965 days to be exact, she faithfully kept her record. . . . "And now this year is come to a close," she wrote on December 31, 1800, "and happy is it if we have made a wise improvement of the time." For her, living was to be measured in doing. Nothing was trivial.[36]

This short excerpt bears witness to the profound changes in historical writing over the last half-century.[37] Historical narrative is no longer restricted to great acts of statecraft but now encompasses everyday acts like childbirth and the daily routines of ordinary people trying to make ends meet. While this passage reflects the influence of social history and feminism, it also highlights the new, more active role of the historian in narrating the past—something that distinguished Ulrich's writing from the textbook prose that participants knew best. Ulrich the storyteller is in the thick of her story, sharing her anger at previous historians' dismissal of Martha's diary, identifying with her protagonist's patience and resolve, showing sadness as Martha's life comes to an end. In revealing Martha Ballard the midwife, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich reveals herself. From the power of Ulrich's voice to the power of Martha's indomitable spirit, this excerpt, when read aloud, moved several participants to tears.

Colleen was one of them. An elementary school principal, Colleen had last studied history when she was a high school student. She signed up for the workshop because her school was moving toward an interdisciplinary curriculum and she wanted to understand how history might be combined with other subjects. At the start of the workshop, she admitted that she had a "bad memory," a statement of deficiency in the attribute she thought most important to historical study. But Colleen was surprised by the workshop's end. She was immediately drawn into these documents, identifying with Martha's endless cycle of work in and out of the home, and the competing demands of her roles as mother, career woman, wife, and community leader. The chance to work with original sources was new to Colleen,

and she found it invigorating. During the two days of the workshop, she was among the most vocal and passionate participants.

At the end of the second day, we asked participants to "rewrite history," to take what they had learned and compose a narrative on the role of women in the economic life of colonial and post-Revolutionary America. We gave them the option of amending the selection from Jordan's textbook or putting it aside and starting from scratch. Colleen chose to put it aside. She took pen in hand and wrote furiously, scribbling a few sentences, muttering under her breath about how angry she was at the textbook, crumpling up the paper, and starting again. She wrote without interruption for thirty-five minutes.

You might predict that Colleen's essay would bear the traces of this passion, giving voice to the range of emotions—from identification and recognition to anger and resentment—that she felt as she worked through the documents. But this was not the case. Colleen's detached writing trudged along like the textbook prose she sought to banish. Narrated in the third person, Colleen's account strove for objectivity, or, as she put it later, to "keep my emotions out of it." Nowhere in her two-page history does the word "I" appear. Absent are indications of emphasis, judgment, and doubt. To be sure, the content had shifted. From Colleen we learn that women like Martha Ballard contributed to the colonial economy as midwives, by engaging in small-scale textile production, by raising poultry, and by myriad other activities. The facts may have changed, but the epistemological stance of the text remained firmly intact.

Like Derek before her, Colleen faced a conflict between two spheres of experience: her immediate experience in reading these texts and her prior experiences, especially her memories from high school. Her frustration boiled over when she put pen to paper and could not find a way of resolving the belief that history had slighted her as a woman and the belief that when writing history one should be cool, dispassionate, scientific, objective. In rewriting history Colleen confronted herself, but rather than engage this self and make it a part of her story, she interpreted her job as one of self-effacement—removing from the story her passion, her anger, and even her own experience as a mother. As a result Colleen was nowhere to be found in her creation.

Unrestrained, passion distorts the story we seek to tell. The balancing of perspectives requires us to step back and see things in other ways, an exceedingly difficult thing to do when anger sears our gut. But Colleen went to the other extreme. Rather than compensating for her subjectivity by sharing it with her reader, she tried to construct a story without a teller—to deal with her deep feelings by pretending that they did not exist. In the end, Martha Ballard, a person brought to life in the primary documents, returned to a still life in the document Colleen herself composed.

Ironically, then, Colleen's text bore a greater resemblance to Jordan's *The Americans* than to Ulrich's *A Midwife's Tale.* The textbook and all that it symbolized became for Colleen, and other workshop participants, not *one* way of transmitting the story of the past, but the *only* way.

THE WEAVING OF CONTEXT

How do we navigate the tension between the familiar and the strange? How do we embrace what we share with the past but remain open to aspects that might startle us into reconsidering what it means to be human? The distant past—the burial practices of ancient Egypt, the medical practices of the Middle Ages, the hanging of witches in Salem: These jar us with their strangeness. But what about the more recent past, a time like ours with televisions, radios, cars, and planes, a time that looks superficially like the present except for old-fashioned clothes and hairstyles? How do we approach this past so that it emerges as something more than a faded version of the present?

These questions came into focus when I visited a Seattle high school to observe a class that had watched the PBS series "Eyes on the Prize." On the day I arrived, students had seen the segment in which Governor Ross Barnett physically bars James Meredith from registering at Ole Miss. In the ensuing discussion, the teacher asked students why Barnett objected to Meredith's enrollment. One boy raised his hand and volunteered, "Prejudice." The teacher nodded and the discussion moved on.

That simple "prejudice" unsettled me. Four hundred years of racial history reduced to a one-word response?[38] This set me to wondering what would it take before we begin to think historically about such concepts as "prejudice," "racism," "tolerance," "fairness," and "equity." At what point do we come to see these abstractions not as transcendent truths soaring above time and place, but as patterns of thought that take root in particular historical moments, develop, grow, and emerge in new forms in successive generations while still bearing traces of their former selves?[39] If Ross Barnett's problem was that he was "prejudiced," how would these students and their teachers regard Abraham Lincoln,

variously dubbed the "Great Emancipator" or "White Supremacist" depending on social fashion and current need?[40]

To study this question, I put together a series of documents that combined the words of Abraham Lincoln with the voices of some of his contemporaries: Stephen Douglas, Lincoln's opponent for the 1858 Senate seat from Illinois; John Bell Robinson and John Van Evrie, religious racialists who looked to the Bible for justification of slavery; and William Lloyd Garrison, the abolitionist who worked tirelessly for emancipation.[41] In the same document set I included three documents by Lincoln, each reflecting a different situation in his life: the keen observer traveling up the Mississippi in 1841 and seeing slaves chained together "like so many fish upon a trot-line"; the candidate, debating Stephen Douglas before a largely pro-Douglas crowd in Ottawa, Illinois; and the beleaguered, war-weary president, addressing a group of freed slaves in 1862 about the possibility of founding a freedmen's colony in Central America.

I presented these documents to a group of college history majors and nonmajors, all of whom were enrolled in a fifth-year program to become public school teachers. I asked them to read through these documents and tell me what light they shed on Lincoln's thought. Although there was great variety in participants' responses, two broad trends stood out. One group took Lincoln's words at face value. They saw these words as offering a direct window into Lincoln's mind, unobstructed by either the particular circumstances in which they were uttered or the passage of time between 1860 and today. Lincoln was a racist, pure and simple. Other, more careful, readers recognized that they needed a context for these words. But rather than fashioning a context from the raw materials provided by these documents, they borrowed a context from their contemporary social world.

Faced with seeming incongruities in Lincoln's position, we have at hand an array of contemporary social forms and institutions—press conferences, spin doctors, response dials—which allow us instantly to harmonize discrepant information. Even if we recognize the vast technological changes in the political process between 1860 and today, we often perceive a unity in ways of thinking that span the breach of time. In many readings by college students, Lincoln and Douglas become our contemporaries in top hats, much like characters from a James Michener novel who happen to dress funny but whose behavior and mannerisms are those of our next-door neighbors.

In other words, "presentism"—the act of viewing the past through the lens of the present—is not some bad habit we've fallen into. It is, instead, our psychological condition at rest, a way of thinking that requires little effort and comes quite naturally. If Lincoln seems to be saying two different things, it is because he is speaking to two different audiences, for in our world we know exactly why George W. Bush says one thing to Kansas wheat farmers and another to New York City stockbrokers. In resolving contradictions in Lincoln's words, we turn him into one of us: His goal is to get elected, and he has spin doctors to help.[42]

I broadened my study by asking several working historians to read these same documents. Some of them knew a great deal about Lincoln and had written books about him; others knew little more than what was required to give a few lectures in an undergraduate survey course.[43] Bob Alston, a middle-aged Caucasian Americanist, fit into the latter group. Like most members of his department, he taught undergraduate survey courses spanning all of American history, but the majority of his upper-level and graduate courses were in a different specialization. During graduate school, he had taken examinations that covered the Civil War but had not studied this period extensively since then.

Alston did not have an easy time, and in the beginning his reading is virtually indistinguishable from those of the stronger college students. From Document 1, Douglas's opening statement at Ottawa, Alston stared his lack of knowledge in the face:

> I don't know as much about Lincoln's views as I thought I did. I mean, as I read it and see Douglas perhaps putting words in Lincoln's mouth, I'm not quite sure about what I do and don't know about Lincoln. Douglas makes it sound as if Lincoln believes they're equal, blacks and whites, on virtually every level but I don't know to what extent Lincoln did or did not believe that. I know that he was very practically aware of the concerns of bringing them together as if they were equal in the same society at this point, but I don't know enough about Lincoln's views to make some other judgments I've been making.

In the second document, Lincoln's rebuttal of Douglas, Lincoln states that he has "no purpose to introduce political and social equality" between the races. At this point Alston paused: "Just rereading the sentence again. Again trying to think about how Douglas's statement about Lincoln thinking the two were equal could have some truth if it falls outside the realm of what Lincoln identifies as political and social equality." Seven lines later, Alston stopped again: "I'm going back and rereading the

sentence. These nineteenth-century orators spoke in more complicated sentences. They weren't used to sound bites. I'm wondering what he means by 'physical difference' ":

> If blacks have the "natural rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" one would assume that liberty and pursuit of happiness would indicate that they cannot be slaves at the same time. Similarly, if blacks have the "right to eat the bread which his own hand earns," that they have the right to the product of their labor, that is the pursuit of happiness or liberty, one form or the other, then if that is a natural right then slavery goes against those natural rights.

When the college students reached this point, they tended to locate this contradiction in Lincoln or created multiple Lincolns who said different things to different people. But Alston responded by calling attention to the contradiction, not dissolving it. Over the next five documents, his reading was a prolonged exercise in the "specification of ignorance." He asked, on average, 4.2 questions per document, and underscored what he did not know with markers such as "I don't have enough to go on" or "This makes no sense to me" a total of fourteen times. Only at the end of the task did Alston come up with something resembling an interpretation. It came in response to the passage in which John Bell Robinson appeals to God as providing a sanction for slavery. At this point Alston made the following comment (asterisks indicate places in the reading where he flipped back to previous documents):

> Lincoln . . . talks about Blacks being endowed with certain things from God, but "usefulness as slaves" or a status of slaves isn't one of the things that he mentions. [I'm going to] look at some of the earlier [documents]. What I'm looking for is his discussion [of] the physical difference between the two and his discussion of natural rights [to] see if he links those at all to God.* It was Douglas* who linked Lincoln to believe about the Negro to God and the Declaration of Independence. But in this,*in Lincoln's reply, he refers—I'm looking here for reference to God—I'm not finding it but I haven't finished yet, he refers to the Declaration of Independence. But in the letter to Mary Speed* he did say "how true it is that God renders the worst of human conditions tolerable." But God didn't render slavery a condition that Blacks ought to find themselves in, according to Lincoln. Lincoln keeps going out of it in these things, he talks about the Declaration of Independence,* he talks about natural rights—I'm not sure where these come from in his mind—and he talks about natural differences. But he does not bring God into it other than to say that God makes, God allows people to make the worst of human conditions tolerable.* And that's a form of mercy, not of any kind of restriction on their status or behavior. What I thought—Douglas* has accused Lincoln of saying that Blacks had equal rights from the Declaration of Independence and God. Lincoln didn't say that in these things. [He didn't say] anything about God, just the Declaration of Independence* and natural rights, wherever those come from.

This is a dense excerpt that itself merits interpretation. John Bell Robinson's reference to God sparked confusion and sent Alston back to Lincoln's response to Douglas. There, he searched for Lincoln's invocation of God. Finding only a reference to the Declaration of Independence, the historian returned to Douglas's opening statement. He then jumped to the letter by Mary Speed, written in 1841, where the word "God" is found but with very different connotations from Robinson's invocation. From the Speed letter Alston went back to the second document, Lincoln's response to Douglas, for another look at the reference to the Declaration of Independence and "natural rights."

In the course of this zigzagging comment, Alston referred to the previous documents eight times. He learned that whereas Robinson appeals to God to justify slavery as an institution appropriate for a lower form of manhood, Lincoln appeals to God to connect the races in common humanity. Through this intertextual weave, Alston learned that Lincoln justifies the equality of Africans, not by appealing to God, but by appealing to "natural rights," a view of Lincoln that comes remarkably close to Richard Weaver's "argument by definition" interpretation.[44] Although Alston started the task confused and full of questions, he ended up with a nuanced and sophisticated understanding of Lincoln's position.

What Alston did here is misrepresented by notions of "placing" or "putting" Lincoln into context, verbs that conjure up images of jigsaw puzzles in which pieces are slotted into pre-existing frames. Contexts are neither "found" nor "located," and words are not "put" into context. Context, from the Latin *contexere*, means to weave together, to engage in an active process of connecting things in a pattern. Alston made something new here, something that did not exist before he engaged these documents and confronted his ignorance.

The questions Alston asked are the tools of creation, dwelling in the space between his present knowledge and the circumstances of the past. Alston is an expert, to be sure, but not in the sense in which that term is typically used. His expertise lay not in his sweeping knowledge of this topic but in his ability to pick himself up after a tumble, to get a fix on what he does not know, and to generate a road map to guide his new learning. He was an expert at cultivating puzzlement. It was Alston's ability to stand back from first impressions, to question his quick leaps

of mind, and to keep track of his questions that together pointed him in the direction of new learning. Such an approach requires skill, technique, and a great deal of know-how. But mature historical cognition is more: It is an act that engages the heart.

So, for example, when Alston encountered the phrase "we have men . . . capable of thinking as White men," uttered by Lincoln in his address to the freed slaves, he was not only confused by the language but also visibly shaken by it. But rather than resolving his discomfort by concluding that Lincoln was a racist, Alston sat with this discomfort over the course of several documents. When he said, shaking his head, "I don't know what Lincoln is saying," he did not mean that he was confused by the words on the page, but something much larger: that he was confused by the world conjured up by these words, a world in which one human being could go to the market to buy others. What could Lincoln's words mean in *that* world?[45] And what did he as a modern historian not know that prevented him from fully entering Lincoln's world?

Alston's reading shows a humility before the narrowness of our contemporary experience and an openness before the expanse of the history of the species. It grants people in the past the benefit of the doubt by casting doubt on our ability to know them as easily as we know ourselves. This does not mean that we cannot judge the past—we cannot help making judgments. But it does mean that we must not rush to judgment. Other readers used these documents to confirm their prior beliefs. They encountered the past here and labeled it. Alston encountered the past and learned from it.

A UNICORN OR A RHINOCEROS?

Several years ago I went to see *Schindler's List*. I had long been acquainted with Steven Spielberg's oeuvre—what parent isn't?—so I was wary. I was drawn into the movie immediately, but what stays with me years later is what happened after the final credits rolled. I watched the man in front of me turn to his wife and say, "I never understood what happened then until now, right now. Now, I know."

I don't want to read too much into this comment, other than to note that it was a fragment of the present, shot on location in Kraków, that gave birth to this man's understanding. As I sat in the theater, my thoughts settled on the puzzle of understanding set by the Italian chemist Primo Levi, whose writings on the Holocaust, lyrical and haunting,

always offer insight. "Among the questions that are put to us," wrote Levi, "one question is never absent; indeed, as the years go by, it is formulated with ever increasing persistence and with an ever less hidden accent of accusation."[46] The question Levi refers to actually has three parts:

1. Why did you not escape?
2. Why did you not rebel?
3. Why did you not evade capture before they "got to you"?

Levi describes what happened when he spoke to a group of fifth graders in an elementary school:

> An alert-looking boy, apparently at the head of the class, asked me the obligatory question: "But how come you didn't escape?" I briefly explained to him what I have written here. Not quite convinced, he asked me to draw a sketch of the camp on the blackboard indicating the location of the watch towers, the gates, the barbed wire, and the power station. I did my best, watched by thirty pairs of intent eyes. My interlocutor studied the drawing for a few instants, asked me for a few further clarifications, then he presented to me the plan he had worked out: here, at night, cut the throat of the sentinel; then, put on his clothes; immediately after this, run over there to the power station and cut off the electricity, so the search lights would go out and the high tension fence would be deactivated; after that I could leave without any trouble. He added seriously: "If it should happen to you again, do as I told you. You'll see that you'll be able to do it."[47]

This boy did everything we want from our students. He engaged with the subject matter, he drew on his background knowledge, he formulated questions and offered solutions. Lest we attribute the boy's question to his tender age, we should bear in mind that these same questions have been posed by people far older and far more knowledgeable. For this boy, as for many of us, Levi's experience inspires incredulity: This youngster cannot believe that so many could miss what is, in his mind, so very plain.

In his response, Primo Levi echoes one of the central themes that I have explored here: the seductiveness of coming to know people in the past by relying on the dimensions of our "lived experience." But for Levi the problem is broader than one of historical knowing. Our "inability to perceive the experience of others," as he put it, applies to the present no less than the past.[48] This is why the study of history is so crucial to our present day and age, when issues of diversity dominate the national agenda. Coming to know others, whether they live on the other side of the tracks or the other side of the millennium, requires the education of

our sensibilities. This is what history, when taught well, gives us practice in doing. Paradoxically, what allows us to come to know others is our distrust in our capacity to know them, a skepticism about the extraordinary sense-making abilities that allow us to construct the world around us.

A skepticism toward the products of mind can sometimes slide into cynicism or solipsism. But this need not be the case. The awareness that the contradictions we see in others may tell us more about ourselves is the seed of intellectual charity. It is an understanding that counters narcissism. For the narcissist sees the world—both the past and the present—in his own image. Mature historical knowing teaches us to do the opposite: to go beyond our own image, to go beyond our brief life, and to go beyond the fleeting moment in human history into which we have been born. History educates ("leads outward" in the Latin) in the deepest sense. Of the subjects in the secular curriculum, it is the best at teaching those virtues once reserved for theology—humility in the face of our limited ability to know, and awe in the face of the expanse of human history.

On his journey from China to India, the Venetian traveler Marco Polo ventured into Basman, believed to be Sumatra, where he chanced upon a species he had never before seen: the rhinoceros. But Polo did not see it that way. As his diary records, he saw instead

> unicorns, which are scarcely smaller than elephants. They have the hair of a buffalo . . . [and] a single large, black horn in the middle of the forehead. They do not attack with their horn, but only with their tongue and their knees; for their tongues are furnished with long, sharp spines. . . . They are very ugly brutes to look at . . . not at all such as we describe them when . . . they let themselves be captured by virgins.[49]

Our encounter with history presents us with a choice: to learn about rhinoceroses or to learn about unicorns. We naturally incline toward unicorns—they are prettier and more tame. But it is the rhinoceros that can teach us far more than we could ever imagine.

NOTES

This chapter began as a talk given at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association, held in New York in January 1997. It appeared in print in the *Phi Delta Kappan* (March 1999). In writing it, I tried to do two things: to bring conceptual order to the work on historical teaching and learning that I had done since the late eighties, and to weigh in on the "standards war" raging from coast to coast. Previous versions benefited from comments by Peter Seixas, Peter Stearns, Susan Mosborg, Debby Kerdeman, David Lowenthal, Veronica Boix Mansilla, Howard Gardner, Chris Browning, Kent Jewell, and the perspicacious but gentle members of the "Aspects of Historical Cognition" seminar at the University of Haifa (1997–98). Risë Koben at the *Kappan* provided priceless editorial feedback and encouragement. I thank them all.

1. Cited in Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York, 1997), 232.
2. Ibid., 234.
3. Ibid., 197.
4. Ibid., 204.
5. Ibid., 245.
6. Ibid., 10–11. As Todd Gitlin points out, the history wars cannot be reduced to a simple left/right political struggle but have manifested as bitter internecine struggles within the left itself. See Gitlin's account of the Oakland, California, textbook adoption process in *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America Is Wracked by Culture Wars* (New York, 1995).
7. *American Scholar* 67 (Winter 1998), 91.
8. Ibid., 103.
9. Cited in Paul Gagnon, "History's Role in Civic Education: The Precondition for Political Intelligence," in Walter C. Parker, ed., *Educating the Democratic Mind* (Albany, 1996), 243.
10. See the incisive comments by T. S. Hamerow in *Reflections on History and Historians* (Madison, 1987).
11. Carl N. Degler, "Remaking American History," *Journal of American History* 67 (1980), 24.
12. See Chapter 3. For copies of all the original documents used, see Samuel S. Wineburg, "Historical Problem Solving: A Study of the Cognitive Processes Used in the Evaluation of Documentary and Pictorial Evidence," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 83 (1991), 73–87. "Derek," like other participants' names, is a pseudonym.
13. Ibid., 79.
14. Bradley Commission on History in Schools, *Building a History Curriculum: Guidelines for Teaching History in Schools* (Washington, D.C., 1988).
15. Adam Hirsch, "The Collision of Military Cultures in Seventeenth-Century New England," *Journal of American History* 74 (1988), 1187–1212.
16. Solomon Stoddard writing to Joseph Dudley, October 22, 1703, cited in Hirsch, "Collision," 1208.
17. Allan Megill, "Recounting the Past: 'Description,' Explanation, and Narrative in Historiography," *American Historical Review* 94 (1989), 632.
18. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," in Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan, eds., *Interpretative Social Science* (Berkeley, 1979).
19. Robin G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford, 1946), 215.
20. Jonathan Kandell, "Was the World Made Out of Cheese? Carlo Ginzburg Is Fascinated by Questions That Others Ignore," *New York Times Magazine* (November 17, 1991), 47.
21. Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre* (New York, 1985), 4.

22. Richard White, *Remembering Ahanagran: Storytelling in a Family's Past* (New York, 1998), 13.
23. Louis O. Mink, *Historical Understanding* (Ithaca, 1987), 103.
24. Ibid.
25. David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, England, 1985).
26. The quotation from Degler appears on the book jacket: Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785–1812* (New York, 1990).
27. This workshop was the brainchild of Randy Schenkat and was taught collaboratively with Professor Kathy Roth of Michigan State University, a specialist in the teaching of biology. The workshop's intent was to model an interdisciplinary approach that joins forces while still maintaining the powerful lenses that two different disciplines bring to a common problem. See Roth's critique of the typical approach to interdisciplinary curricula in K–12 settings: "Second Thoughts about Interdisciplinary Studies," *American Educator* 18 (1994), 44–48.
28. Roland Barthes, "Historical Discourse," in Michael Lane, ed., *Introduction to Structuralism* (New York, 1970), 145–55.
29. Avon Crismore, "The Rhetoric of Textbooks: Metadiscourse," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 16 (1984), 279–96. See also Richard Paxton, " 'Someone with Like a Life Wrote It': The Effects of a Visible Author on High School History Students," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 89 (1997), 235–50.
30. The book is corporately authored, with Jordan as the main historian and two collaborators: Winthrop D. Jordan, Miriam Greenblatt, and John S. Bowes, *The Americans: The History of a People and a Nation* (Evanston, Ill., 1985).
31. Ibid., 68.
32. Ulrich, *Midwife's Tale*, 162.
33. Ibid., 251.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., 41.
36. Ibid., 9.
37. See Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, England, 1988).
38. English navigators reached the shores of West Africa sometime after 1550. See Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (New York, 1968), chap. 1.
39. See Chapter 4 of this volume. My framing of these questions is indebted to David Lowenthal's essay, "The Timeless Past: Some Anglo-American Historical Preconceptions," *Journal of American History* 75 (1989), 1263–80. See also Ronald T. Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (Boston, 1993).
40. For an introduction to the ways Lincoln has been viewed, see Merrill Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory* (New York, 1994). For a concise statement on Lincoln's views on race see Arthur Zilversmit, *Lincoln and the Problem of Race: A Decade of Interpretations*, Papers of the Abraham Lincoln Association (Springfield, Ill., 1980), 22–45. For an example of how Lincoln was viewed during the height of the Black Power movement of the 1960s, see Lerone Bennett, Jr., "Was Abe Lincoln a White Supremacist?" *Ebony* 23 (February 1968), 35–42.

41. My inspiration for situating Lincoln among his contemporaries in this exercise came from George M. Fredrickson's *The Black Image in the White Mind* (New York, 1971).
42. To be fair, this student is in esteemed company in this reading. In *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made it* (New York, 1948), Richard Hofstadter wondered whether Lincoln's mind was "a house divided against itself. In any case it is easy to see in all this the behavior of a professional politician looking for votes" (p. 116).
43. See Chapter 4 for copies of the documents. For a full description of the methodology, see Sam Wineburg, "Reading Abraham Lincoln: An Expert-Expert Study in the Interpretation of Historical Texts," *Cognitive Science* 22 (1998), 319–46.
44. Richard M. Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (Chicago, 1953).
45. On this point see, in particular, Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8 (1969), 3–53.
46. Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York, 1989), 150–51.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid., 151.
49. Marco Polo, *The Travels* (Suffolk, England, 1958), 253. Thanks to Mike Bryant for pointing this passage out.

2

The Psychology of Teaching and Learning History

It was a politician, not a historian, who offered the most persuasive rationale for studying history. Addressing the Roman Senate nearly a century before the birth of Christ, Cicero proclaimed, "Not to know what happened before one was born is always to be a child." Since the beginning of the twentieth century, scholars have tried to understand the unique features and challenges of learning and teaching history. Too often those who inquire into these questions have little awareness of the efforts of their predecessors, venturing childlike into issues that would benefit from a historical mooring.

My goal here is to redress this predicament by examining the ways in which scholars have studied the learning and teaching of history.[1] Most of this research has been conducted, for better or worse (and often it *is* for worse), by psychologists. Even when historians or historically minded philosophers try their hand at conducting empirical studies, their approach bears the imprint of psychological research and its core assumptions.[2] Future research on learning and teaching history may indeed grow beyond this psychological legacy, but in so doing it will still have to contend with its past. Understanding this legacy thus becomes central in creating a path to future inquiries.

To view the body of psychological work on history as a cohesive undertaking would be to commit the error of novices in a famous study of expertise in physics: the tendency to group elements by surface similarity, not by deep

structure.[3] In reality, the studies described here are united more by common keywords in data bases than by a shared conceptual focus. Research on history may be thought of as the counterpoint to Shakespeare's rose. Though the word "history" appears in all these reports, it rarely describes the same thing. To researchers, historical understanding can mean anything from memorizing a list of dates to mastering a set of logical relations, from being able to recite an agreed-upon story to contending with ill-defined problems resistant to single interpretations. These histories and the empirical studies done in their name tell as much about the researchers who conducted them as about the children and teachers who participated in them. In this sense, the body of psychological research on history constitutes an intriguing historical record in its own right, a landscape of mixed forms that attests to the multiplicity of ways in which the study of the past can be understood.

My story is organized into three sections. First, I discuss the treatment of history by early psychologists working in the United States. The accomplishments and shortcomings of this work, the goals it achieved or left unfulfilled, disclose much about our present condition. In the second section I examine research conducted in Great Britain. Although this work goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century, I pick up the story with the research programs of British psychologists working in the Piagetian tradition.[4] In the final section I review contemporary research programs that have arisen with the collapse of behaviorism and the ascension of cognitive approaches to learning.

RESEARCH ON HISTORY: SOME EARLY INVESTIGATIONS

For the founders of educational psychology, history was more a topic of theoretical than empirical concern. In the 442 pages of Edward L. Thorndike's *Educational Psychology—Briefer Course*, history goes unmentioned save for a single reference to sex differences in historical achievement (which favored boys).[5] Only in *Education: A First Book* does history receive more than fleeting attention. Here Thorndike paused to speculate on the burning question of his day: Should history be taught "backward," that is, beginning with the present and tracing events back in time, or was the traditional chronological treatment better suited to the abilities and dispositions of youngsters? Despite the absence of data, Thorndike was certain of the answer:

> The educational value of finding the causes of what is, and then the causes of these causes, is so very much superior to the spurious reasoning which comes from explaining a record already known . . . that the arrangement of the . . . course in history in the inverse temporal order . . . deserves serious consideration.[6]

G. Stanley Hall, the premier developmental psychologist of his day, shared Thorndike's speculative interest in history teaching. Given Hall's concern with the development of character, it is not surprising that he saw in historical study a tool for helping students place events in a "temporal perspective as products of growth and development," a subject that, especially during adolescence, should be infused with lessons that "inspire to the greatest degree ideals of social service and unselfishness."[7] Not a battleground of competing interpretations, a tangle of ill-defined problems, or even a site for the development of critical thinking, Hall's history would be a unifying moral force, "a thesaurus of inspiring ethical examples to show how all got their deserts in the end."[8]

Among early educational psychologists, Chicago's Charles Hubbard Judd dealt incisively with history. Judd's chapter in the *Psychology of High-School Subjects* was a treatment impressive in scope, embracing in twenty-nine pages the nature of chronological thinking, the difficulties of causal judgment ("much more complicated" in history than in science), the dangers of dramatic reenactments, the psychological difficulties presented by historical evidence, and the motivational role of social (then called "industrial") history.[9] While drawing on the work of others, including the Committee of Seven[10] and the Committee of Five,[11] Judd's discussion contains its own flourishes of insight. In a section entitled "The Intricacy of Moral Judgments," Judd dealt with the psychological inevitability of presentism, the difficulty—perhaps even the impossibility—of understanding the past on its own terms:

> The modern student is . . . guided in all of his judgments by an established mode of thought . . . peculiar to his own generation. We have certain notions . . . that are wholly different from the notions that obtained at the time that England was in controversy with her American colonies. When . . . [the student] is suddenly carried back in his historical studies to situations that differ altogether from the situations that now confront him, he is likely to carry back, without being fully aware of the fallacy of his procedure, those standards of judgment and canons of ethical thought which constitute his present inheritance.[12]

In this short comment Judd anticipated issues that would occupy researchers' attention well into the final decades of the twentieth century.

In 1917, the year the United States entered World War I, history made it into the pages of the ten-year-old *Journal of Educational Psychology*. J. Carleton Bell, managing editor of the *Journal* and professor at the Brooklyn Training School for Teachers, began his tenure with an editorial entitled "The Historic Sense." (A timely second editorial examined the relationship of psychology to military problems.) Bell argued that the study of history provided an opportunity for thinking and reflection, the opposite of what he claimed went on in much instruction. However, to teachers who would aim at these lofty goals, Bell put two questions: "What is the historic sense?" and "How can it be developed?"[13] Such questions, he continued, did not concern the history teacher alone but were ones "in which the educational psychologist is interested, and which it is incumbent upon him to attempt to answer."[14]

Bell offered clues about where to locate the "historic sense." Presented with a set of primary documents, one student produces a coherent account while another assembles "a hodgepodge of miscellaneous facts."[15] What factors and ways of thought account for this discrepancy? Similarly, some college freshmen "show great skill in the orderly arrangement of their historical data," while others "take all statements with equal emphasis . . . and become hopelessly confused in the multiplicity of details."[16] Do such findings reflect "native differences in historic ability," Bell wondered, or are they the "effects of specific courses of training"? Such questions opened up "a fascinating field for investigation" for the new field of educational psychology.[17]

Bell put his finger on questions that continue to occupy us today: What is the essence of historical understanding? What determines success on tasks that have more than one right answer? What role might instruction play in improving students' ability to think? Given this forward-looking research agenda, it is sobering to examine how it unfolded in practice. In a companion piece to his editorial, Bell and his associate David F. McCollum presented an empirical study that began by sketching out the various ways historical understanding might be assessed:[18]

1. "[T]he ability to understand present events in light of the past."[19]
2. The ability to sift through the documentary record—newspaper accounts, hearsay, partisan attacks, contemporary accounts—and construct "from this confused tangle a straightforward and probable account" of what happened. This is important, especially, because it is the goal of many "able and earnest college teachers of history."[20]

3. The ability to appreciate a historical narrative.
4. "[R]eflective and discriminating replies to 'thought questions' on a given historical situation."[21]
5. The ability to answer factual questions about historical personalities and events.

Bell and McCollum conceded that this last aspect was "the narrowest, and in the estimation of some writers, the least important type of historical ability," but it was, fatefully, the one "most readily tested."[22] In a decisive move, the authors announced that the ability to answer factual questions was "chosen for study in the present investigation."[23] While perhaps the first instance, this was not to be the last in which ease of measurement, not priority of subject matter understanding, determined the contours of a research program.

Bell and McCollum composed a test of names (e.g., John Burgoyne, Alexander Hamilton, Cyrus H. McCormick), dates (e.g., 1492, 1776, 1861), and events (e.g., the Sherman Antitrust Law, the Fugitive Slave Law, the Dred Scott decision) believed by teachers to be important facts every student should know. They gave their test to 1,500 students at the upper elementary (fifth through seventh grades), secondary, and college levels. In the upper elementary grades, students answered 16 percent of the questions correctly; in high school (after a year of U.S. history), 33 percent; and in college, after a third exposure to history, 49 percent. Taking a stand customarily reserved for country preachers, and more recently for secretaries of education and op-ed columnists, Bell and McCollum indicted the educational system and its charges: "Surely a grade of 33 in 100 on the simplest and most obvious facts of American history is not a record in which any high school can take pride."[24]

Six years later, in 1923, D. H. Eikenberry replicated these findings, though on a smaller scale.[25] He found that not one of thirty-four university seniors could remember who was president during the Mexican War (James K. Polk), and fewer than half could remember the president of the Confederacy (Jefferson Davis). Similar patterns emerged from a *New York Times* survey of historical knowledge given to 7,000 students in the 1940s, and little has changed since then, according to contemporary findings from the National Assessment of Educational Progress examination in American history.[26] Viewed in historical perspective, these recent results provide scant evidence for what some have claimed is a "gradual disintegration of cultural memory."[27] Instead, the

consistency of these results testifies to a peculiar American pastime: the practice by each generation of testing its young, only to discover—and rediscover—their "shameful" ignorance.[28] But as Dale Whittington has shown, when test results from the early part of the twentieth century are compared with the most recent findings, we learn that there has been little appreciable change in students' historical knowledge over time,[29] despite the enormous expansion of high school enrollments in this century. If anything, the consistency of these results casts doubt on a presumed golden age of fact retention. Appeals to such an age are more the stuff of national lore and a wistful nostalgia for a time that never was than a reference to national history whose reality can be found in the documentary record.

J. Carleton Bell's colleague at the Brooklyn Training School, Garry C. Myers, took a different route in exploring historical knowledge. Myers was more interested in students' wrong answers than in their correct ones.[30] He asked 107 college women to name one fact about each of fifty historical figures. He found that fewer than 50 percent of the names were recalled accurately, with 40 percent "lost between the time of mastery and that of recall."[31] But this loss was not an erasure. Wrong answers, Myers found, were often statements of facts wrongly connected, the result of systematic efforts that followed a discernible pattern.[32] For example, Philip John Schuyler, one of four major generals commissioned by Congress during the Revolutionary War, was connected to wars ranging from the French and Indian War to the Civil War, but his status as general remained unchanged. Names like that of the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison were confused with names that sounded similar, like President William Henry Harrison. And people with common last names, like Cyrus McCormick, the inventor of the reaper, were confused with others bearing a homonymous name, in this case John McCormack, the Irish crooner whose ballads were popular in the twenties. "Wrong answers deserve more careful study," urged Myers, anticipating future researchers' concern with error analysis, "and may give the teacher more and better information about his teaching than can be obtained from the traditional study of correct answers."[33]

Myers's study resists easy classification. On one hand, his recognition of the human tendency to "make some kind of response to a situation" foreshadowed the British social psychologist Sir Francis Bartlett's "effort after meaning" some fifteen years later.[34] On the other hand, he

struck a chord that resonated with the associationism of the German psychologist Herman Ebbinhaus when he warned teachers to "exercise the greatest care . . . to insure correct recitations" so that the learner keeps "each element of his knowledge eternally associated with his mate."[35] But the recitation Myers had in mind was not mindless drill. Rather, children would "perceive facts in proper relation during study" using "hitching posts," or slots in memory, that the learner "needs to keep constantly in view."[36] Here Myers's appeal to cognitive hierarchies with major and minor points recalled an earlier Herbartian tradition and anticipated later notions of cognitive organizers popularized by David Ausubel and other pioneers of the cognitive revolution.[37]

Not all psychologists shared Myers's fascination with wrong answers, or Bell's with the historic sense. B. R. Buckingham, then editor of the *Journal of Educational Research* and professor of education at the University of Illinois, bristled in response to charges that tests of factual knowledge missed the most important aspects of historical knowing. "The case against memory has been vastly overstated," he fumed. "Even when we think we are appealing to a supposedly higher process, we may really be dealing only with a somewhat higher form of memory."[38] To support his claim, Buckingham administered questions from the "Van Wagenen Test of Historical Information and Judgment" to elementary and high school students and found a correlation of .4 between the factual items of this instrument and its "thought" items.[39] Rather than concluding that factual knowledge and historical reasoning went hand-in-hand, Buckingham made a bolder claim: What people called "historical reasoning" was actually nothing more than knowledge of facts! Buckingham argued his case by analyzing the "thought items" on the Van Wagenen test:

> The first [question on the Thought Scale] reads as follows: "Before the steamboats were made people used to travel on the ocean in sail boats. Steamboats were not made until a long, long time after the European people came to make their homes in America. How do you think these early European settlers came to America?" The acceptable answer is "in sail boats" and it is a fact. Therefore the question is a fact question although introduced by the words, "How do you think?"[40]

Buckingham believed that higher forms of historical understanding may be inferred from the factual component of the Van Wagenen scale "with substantial accuracy *without giving any other test.*"[41] Moreover, he claimed, because of the relationship between factual tests and higher mental abilities in history, we actually "encour[age] the training of these higher abilities" when we administer tests of facts.[42]

Buckingham's shaky logic did not escape his contemporaries. The next issue of the *Journal of Educational Research* carried a short but stinging response by F. S. Camp, superintendent of schools in Stamford, Connecticut, who wryly identified himself as a "member of the [research] laity" but "not of the laity so far as teaching history is concerned."[43] Camp questioned the validity of Van Wagenen's scale, and particularly its ability to tap historical thinking. His own experience as a history teacher told him that it was possible to construct questions that measured students' ability to think deeply in history. For example: "Suppose Champlain in 1608 had chanced to befriend the Mohawks (Iroquois). What would probably have been the results of the New York campaign of the French in 1758?"[44] The answers to such questions, argued Camp, drew on factual knowledge, but the student, in formulating a response, "must examine, weigh and accept or reject facts; he must then organize them. And that requires staunch thinking."[45]

Camp's concerns, while perhaps persuasive to other history teachers, seemed to have little effect on test developers. As research efforts turned increasingly to scale development and refinement, historical knowledge, viewed as a menu of possibilities by Bell and McCollum, narrowed perilously toward a concentration on just one of their entrees—the ability to answer factual questions about historical personalities and events.[46] Advances in the field of educational measurement carried with them a certain antipathy to traditional forms of assessment in history classes, like essay writing.[47] According to one study, essays were "distasteful" not only to students but also to teachers, because the "scrutinizing, marking, and correcting of the student products is the teacher's greatest bugbear."[48] What if it could be shown that written work, in addition to being laborious, produced little benefit? Worse, what if the essay produced "as much harm as it does good?"[49] This was precisely the claim of F. R. Gorman and D. S. Morgan, whose study was conducted in three U.S. history classrooms.

These classes, all taught by the same teacher, were assigned different amounts of written homework. Class I was assigned "three units," Class II "one unit," and Class III none at all. Class III indeed did best on the factual outcome measure (181 points versus 175 for Class I), but the authors failed to account for the wide disparity in the entering achievement levels among students. Moreover, the researchers' homework assignments often looked more like directions for busy work than

requests for thoughtful written responses (e.g., "List Lincoln's cabinet with the offices held by each" or "List the states which seceded in order, with the dates of secession").[50] When Gorman and Morgan concluded that "the popularity of written work with teachers may result from a confusion of busy work with valid learning procedures,"[51] one wonders where the confusion truly lay: with muddled teachers or with zealous researchers hell-bent on demonstrating the ineffectiveness of written assignments?

Advances in psychometrics fueled the movement toward objective testing, as did the spirit of Taylorism that swept American schools between the world wars.[52] But it would be wrong to see the focus on "objective" testing as a movement restricted to education. The fact-based image of historical knowledge fit cozily with prevailing views of knowledge in the discipline of history. As educational psychologists worked to produce reliable and objective history scales, university historians tried to extricate themselves from their humanistic roots so as to emerge as scientists who would, as the saying went, "cross an ocean to verify a comma."[53] This doggedly factualist approach, as Peter Novick has argued, helped distinguish professional historians from their amateur colleagues, a distinction necessary if history was to become a full-fledged member of the academic community.[54] It is no coincidence, then, that at almost the same time that L. W. Sackett was presenting his refinement of a world history scale in the pages of the *Journal of Educational Psychology*, a scale that would "nearly eliminate the subjective factor in grading history,"[55] the *American Historical Review*'s editorial policy was being formulated to exclude from its pages "matters of opinion" in favor of "matters of fact capable of determination one way or another."[56] This was an age characterized not by a breach between school and academy, but by a tightly woven nexus.

Following World War I, with the ascent of behaviorism as the dominant research paradigm of American psychologists, the concerns of a J. Carleton Bell or an F. S. Camp were all but abandoned.[57] Even in the odd study that took up history, the focus rarely veered from how to apportion facts so that they could be easily committed to memory.[58] The earlier concerns of Charles Judd with history's distinctive psychological features were overshadowed by sweeping learning theories that applied equally to all domains. Well into the 1970s, the psychologist Robert Gagné could blithely claim that learning was not unique to subject matter and that there was "no sound rational basis for such entities

as 'mathematics learning,' 'science learning,' 'language learning' or 'history learning,' except as divisions of time devoted to these subjects during a school day or term."[59] Not until a decade later would this position meet serious challenges among mainstream psychologists of learning.

Ironically, some of the features of history learning that Judd identified may have contributed to its neglect by researchers. The lack of consensus about right answers in history complicated the measurement of outcomes, for if researchers deemed tests of facts trivial and term papers (often the product of historical understanding at the college level) unwieldy, they were faced with the forbidding prospect of creating wholly new measures. Other factors doubtless came into play. The rise of social studies on American soil presented new challenges to researchers because of the conceptual and epistemological differences in the disciplines brought under its umbrella. Further, in contrast to mathematics, where an active research community of subject matter and curriculum experts borrowed from and contributed to psychological theorizing, there was no such group among social studies educators. Research conducted by this latter group was usually a one way street: Psychological concepts were borrowed, but little was offered in return. These factors—and doubtless others—contributed to a period of relative neglect in research on the learning and teaching of history from the end of World War I to the advent of the cognitive revolution.

DEVELOPMENTS IN GREAT BRITAIN: PIAGET, PEEL, AND BEYOND

While American researchers focused on paired associates and running rats through mazes, psychologists in Great Britain followed a different lead. From the late 1950s to well into the 1970s, the theories of Jean Piaget provided the framework for understanding the school curriculum. In a twenty-eight-year span beginning in 1955, no fewer than two dozen theses and dissertations on historical learning from a Piagetian perspective were produced in Great Britain.[60] Although recent British work on history has ventured into different areas, it is impossible to conceive of it apart from its Piagetian roots.

Among the most ambitious research programs was that associated with E. A. Peel, a past president of the British Psychological Society and a professor of educational psychology at the University of Birmingham. For Peel, Piaget's theory was the key to understanding children's

school performance, a means of classifying and systematizing the types of thinking required by different school subjects. Noting that Piaget's work had direct bearing on math and science, Peel set out to extend the theory to children's textual reasoning, particularly their comprehension of written materials in English and history. The essence of understanding in the latter subject, according to Peel, was not to be found in lists of facts but in synthetic forms of thought, like the ability to grasp "cause and effect, a capacity to follow a sustained argument and a power to evaluate."[61]

Although Peel often addressed history in his theoretical writings,[62] it was his student, Roy N. Hallam,[63] who gave historical research in the Piagetian tradition its biggest push. Hallam gave one hundred British high school students, ranging in age from eleven to nearly seventeen, three textbook passages, one on Mary Tudor, another on the Norman conquest, and the third on the civil wars in Ireland, as well as a series of questions on each. For example, after reading the passage about the Norman conquest, students were asked whether it was right for William to destroy northern England. Hallam classified students' responses according to Piagetian categories of intellectual development. Not relating the question to the information provided was scored as "preoperational thinking"; a well-organized answer that did not go beyond the text was classified as "concrete operational"; and going beyond the text by stating hypotheses and checking them against the text was rated "formal operational."

Of Hallam's one hundred adolescents, only two answered questions consistently at the highest level, that of formal operations. Such findings, and similar results from Peel's other colleagues, led Hallam to conclude that systematic thinking appeared later in history than in math or science.[64] Hallam speculated that this is because history confronts the child with "an 'environment' which envelops the inner motives of adults living probably in another century with mores markedly different from those of the twentieth century."[65] The abstract nature of history, argued Hallam, "can perplex the most intelligent of adults."[66]

It is useful to step back from Hallam's study to see how the ways in which research is framed and executed can predetermine its results. First, students were asked questions that had little connection to what they studied in class. How they might have performed had their instruction stressed the formal aspects of historical reasoning remained an open question. Second, students may have been confused by Hallam's

questions.[67] Consider, for example, the ones that accompanied the passage on Mary Tudor: "Mary Tudor thought that God wanted her to take England back to the Catholic church. (a) What would God have thought of her methods? (b) Can you think of any reasons why Mary Tudor should use such methods to make people follow her religion?"[68] What on earth were students to answer in response? For his part, Hallam was anything but tentative about the meaning of his findings: History, for children younger than fourteen, "should not be too abstract in form, nor should it contain too many variables."[69]

The desire to isolate the basic psychological processes embedded in learning history created challenges for Piagetian researchers. One problem was how to minimize the effects of students' prior knowledge, which was viewed as introducing unwanted variation to experimental results. Margaret F. Jurd tried to solve this problem by writing "historical" scenarios about three imaginary countries, Adza, Mulba, and Nocha.[70] Students were presented with a chart showing parallel events in two of these made-up countries and had to predict what would happen in the third. In Mulba, for example, "Richard became dictator" after "having led his people to victory against invaders," while in Adza, Henry became king after his father's death.[71] Students were then given a list of five events in Nocha's history, from a buildup in military spending to a decline in standard of living, and asked to order events in the correct sequence using comparative data from Adza and Mulba. Jurd interpreted students' performance in Piagetian terms. Success hinged on "identifying . . . one or more variables and the kinds of relations which might be thought to exist between them."[72] Students who identified only one variable and made no classification of it were judged "preoperational," while those who coordinated multiple variables while holding others constant were judged to be exhibiting formal operational thought.

By creating imaginary countries or restricting historical information to short textbook passages, Jurd, Hallam, and others attempted to control for students' prior knowledge. But there was something odd about decontextualizing historical events (or inventing fictional history) in a field that stresses the centrality of context.[73] Filtered through Piagetian lenses, historical reasoning came to resemble the textbook version of hypothetical-deductive reasoning in the natural sciences, complete with formalized techniques for induction and deduction and strategies for the coordination and classification of variables. The final result was a depiction of historical reasoning that was more persuasive among psychologists than

among historians.[74] Reduced to sets of logical relations and tests of hypotheses, the history in such studies bore only a faint resemblance to the rich hybrid of narration, exposition, and imaginative reconstruction familiar in the discipline.

It is easy to find fault with quixotic efforts to strip away historical context to get at historical cognition. But such criticism should not obscure the fact that Peel, Hallam, Jurd, and others were the first psychologists since J. Carleton Bell to reopen the question of the "historic sense." Their efforts reminded researchers that the best indication of historical reasoning was not children's selection of a right answer, the "mere repetition of learnt facts," but the nature of children's reasoning, their ability to connect ideas, and the justifications they offered for their conclusions.[75] Although these researchers may have gone overboard in drawing conclusions based on limited data, they are to be credited with invigorating a field and launching projects whose influence is felt today.

One question that remains from Piagetian research on history was its impact on practice. In the opinion of Henry G. Macintosh, the past secretary of the British Southern Regional Examinations Board, Piagetian studies caused many history teachers "to undervalue the capacities of their own students and [helped] to ensure that their own teaching methods [made] it a self-fulfilling prophesy."[76] Similar observations came from John Fines, a history educator who claimed that a whole generation of teachers had been "cowed by Piagetian analysis."[77] While it is difficult to assess the accuracy of these claims, it is clear that Piagetian research lent support to the historian G. R. Elton's claim that serious work in history could not begin until students entered university.[78] It is also clear that these pessimistic assessments spurred on other research efforts, particularly those aimed at discovering a brighter side of students' historical capabilities.

This was precisely the challenge before the members of the Schools Council History 13–16 Project. Founded at the University of Leeds in 1973 with approximately sixty participating schools, it grew in ten years to include 20 percent of all British high schools.[79] Its original mission was a reconsideration of the nature of history and its relevance in secondary schools, but in its totality the project offered nothing less than a comprehensive model of the psychology of the subject matter.[80]

The project drew heavily on Paul Hirst's theory of academic disciplines as forms of knowledge. Hirst believed that the disciplines were more than groupings of related topics but constituted fundamentally

different ways of knowing.[81] Accordingly, all knowledge forms exhibited four characteristics: (a) a body of concepts and key ideas—a common vocabulary; (b) distinctive ways of relating these concepts and ideas—a "syntax" for this vocabulary; (c) characteristic ways of establishing warrant for truth claims, such as the psychologist's appeal to the laboratory, or the historian's to the documentary record; and (d) distinctive forms of inquiry, such as the chemist's use of X-ray spectroscopy or the physicist's use of a linear accelerator.

Project founders argued that traditional history instruction constitutes a form of information, not a form of knowledge. Students might master an agreed-upon narrative, but they lacked any way of evaluating it, of deciding whether it, or any other narrative, was compelling or true. Denis Shemilt, the evaluator of the project and later its director, compared students from traditional history classes to drama students who could talk "sensibly about the separate scenes and characters of King Lear, but do not know what a play is."[82] Put differently, such students possessed copious amounts of historical information but had no idea where this information came from.

The Schools Council three-year curriculum began in the eighth grade. It took a nonchronological approach to history, beginning with a course called "What Is History?" that introduced students to the nature of historical evidence, the nature of reasoning from evidence, and problems of reconstruction from partial and mixed evidence. Other parts of the curriculum engaged students in historical research projects and thrust them into intensive inquiries on selected topics (e.g., Elizabethan England, Britain in the years 1815–1851, the American West, the rise of communist China, the Arab–Israeli conflict). Still other topics, like the history of medicine, were included in the curriculum because they exposed students to practices, beliefs, and ways of thinking radically different from their own.

An evaluation of the project conducted in the late 1970s contained three components: (a) a comparison of 500 project and 500 control students on a series of historical concept tests; (b) a matched-pairs comparison of seventy-five project and seventy-five control students on other concept tests (subjects were matched according to sex, IQ, and socioeconomic status); and (c) a matched-pairs study of seventy-eight pairs in which researchers engaged students in interviews about the nature of historical inquiry.[83] But before comparisons could be made between project students and the control group, project staff first had

to invent measures and coding schemes to capture the "form of knowledge" approach to history. For example, students' responses about the nature of history from the matched-pairs interviews were coded using one of four levels spanning the range of historical conceptualization. Level I responses had a "just because" quality. Events happened because they happened, with no inner logic other than their arrangement in temporal sequence. Level II responses viewed history with "an austere, Calvinistic logic," equating historical reconstruction with slotting pieces of a puzzle into a pre-existing form.[84] At Level III, adolescents had a dawning awareness of a disjuncture between historical narratives and "the past," recognizing that the former involved selectivity and judgment and could never reflect the latter in all its complexity. At Level IV, students transcended the search for overarching historical laws and came to understand historical explanation as context-bound and context-sensitive.

The two highest levels of this typology were attained by 68 percent of project students versus 29 percent of the control group. The lowest level was occupied by 15 percent of control-group students versus 1 percent of project students. In each of the three evaluation components, project students outperformed their counterparts from traditional classrooms. For example, 50 percent of control-group students were unable to differentiate between historical and scientific knowledge, versus only 10 percent of project students. And when students were asked to compare history and mathematics, 83 percent of control students saw math as more difficult than history, versus 25 percent of project students. As one student from the control group put it, "In history you just look it up, math you work it out"; another control-group student added, "From one formula in Maths you get three or four others following, but history has no pattern."[85]

The overall picture emerging from the evaluation supported the idea that adolescents could be taught to understand history as a sophisticated form of knowledge. Yet Shemilt's evaluation study was not the story of unqualified success, for, as he noted, the difference between control students and project students could be compared "to the difference between stony, derelict ground barely able to support a few straggling weeds and a cultivated but undisciplined garden in which a few splendid blossoms struggle to show through."[86]

Even so, the portraits of adolescent reasoning offered by project students contrasted sharply with the barren images of adolescent reasoning offered by the Piagetians. This contrast was not lost on John Fines, who

in his introduction to the evaluation report noted that project students "seem to be performing much more hopefully than the Piagetians first thought."[87] Yet, while Shemilt was careful to distinguish the Schools Council effort from the Piagetians, the Schools Council Project—from the nature of its measures to its levels of attainment, and even the graphic layout of its results—is impossible to conceptualize apart from that research tradition. One feels Piaget's presence at every turn, acting sometimes as touchstone, at other times as provocateur, and at yet other times as nodding observer, always at hand if not always acknowledged.

To be sure, Shemilt recognized the debt to Piaget in several places and even signaled a certain optimism about the applicability of Piagetian constructs, provided that they were first "specifically tailored" to the exigencies of history.[88] Left unacknowledged, however, was a certain similarity in research approach between the evaluation study and what some have called the Piaget-Peel-Hallam tradition,[89] a shared tendency by both approaches to thrust children into the role of mini-philosopher, with questions more germane to a discussion in metaphysics than one in history (e.g., "Does the fact that things are inevitable mean that we have no control over them?" "If an event can be altered, if it can be changed, how can it be inevitable?").[90] No doubt such questions have a bearing on historical understanding. But there is danger in equating students' responses to abstract queries with how they might respond when dealing with concrete historical materials. As the psycholinguists have taught us, it is one thing to use the pluperfect flawlessly and quite another to explain how we do it.

In its totality, the evaluation study of the History 13–16 Project yielded the most in-depth look at adolescent historical reasoning to date. Given the complexity of this portrait, one might expect similar attention to be devoted to the other half of the equation—the knowledge, understanding, and practices of the teachers who participated in the project. Here the evaluation study offered fewer insights. Like the traditional pre/post experiment, the 13–16 Evaluation Study provided some sense of where students began and provided evidence that they were different at the end. But beyond an appeal to written curricular materials, it was at a loss to explain change. What did teachers *do* in classes filled with Level I students? How did sophisticated notions of historical understanding get translated into classroom activities, explanations by teachers, or homework assignments for students? What were the key way stations along the path to higher understanding?

The History 13–16 Project provided few answers. Moreover, the question of what teachers needed to know in order to enact this curriculum was not addressed. In fact, there are clues that some project teachers may have had more in common with students functioning at Levels I and II than with those at Level IV. Responding to questionnaire items, nearly half of project teachers believed that primary sources were "necessarily more reliable than secondary sources," and 16 percent agreed with the statement that "people in the past thought and behaved in exactly the same way as people today, and that only the setting was different."[91] Shemilt's disclaimer that "teachers need to familiarize themselves with Project philosophy and objectives" surely missed the point.[82] The key question is this: How do we alter teachers' deeply held beliefs about history? *Can* we alter them?

THE COGNITIVE REVOLUTION: DEVELOPMENTS AND POSSIBILITIES

Every revolution inspires new hopes, and the "cognitive revolution" was no exception.[93] New images of school learning promised to answer questions that had puzzled researchers not only since the beginning of scientific psychology, but since humankind began asking itself what it meant to know and to learn. During the 1970s and 1980s, cognitive researchers illuminated students' thinking in an array of school subjects, from traditional ones like arithmetic, biology, physics, and geometry to newer additions to the curriculum such as computer science and economics. But amidst this efflorescence of research, history was ignored. Indeed, one of the first attempts to draw together the new work on school learning, Ellen Gagné's *The Cognitive Psychology of School Learning*, contained over 400 references—not one of which applied to history.[94]

The 1990s witnessed a dramatic change. Cognitive researchers made up for lost time by launching investigations that addressed topics from children's historical misconceptions to their reading of history textbooks, from teachers' subject matter knowledge to the assessment of expertise in history teaching. The following discussion surveys these and other developments.

Learning

One of the core insights of the cognitive approach to learning is that the learner brings to instruction a mixture of beliefs and conceptions, some

true and others stubbornly false, through which new information is filtered. Although prior research mapped out some aspects of children's historical beliefs, particularly in the area of time and chronology, recent studies have explored their thinking on a range of topics and ideas.[95]

Gail Sinatra, Isabel Beck, and Margaret McKeown provided a sketch of the background knowledge the typical fifth grader brings to history instruction.[96] In interviews with thirty-five fifth graders prior to instruction in American history and thirty-seven sixth graders following instruction, students were asked questions such as "Why do we celebrate the Fourth of July?" "How did our country become a country?" and "Once there was a saying 'no taxation without representation.' What do you think that means?" Shaky understanding characterized students' responses, even after a year of instruction: 74 percent of fifth graders and 57 percent of sixth graders did not mention the war between Great Britain and the colonies in their responses, and 60 percent of all students could provide no information about the motivation of the Revolutionary War.

But students were hardly blank slates. Questions about the Fourth of July often elicited responses about memorials of "deaths of people who were in wars." Similarly, questions about the Declaration of Independence elicited responses ranging from the freeing of slaves to the Mayflower Compact. Like cognitive explorations in other subjects, and Myers's earlier work, Sinatra and her colleagues went beyond a right/wrong answer approach to explore systematic patterns in students' responses.

Bruce VanSledright and Jere Brophy also examined elementary school children's beliefs about history. They interviewed ten fourth graders about key topics in American history.[97] Although VanSledright and Brophy also found knowledge of these topics to be sparse, they found that some children were willing to construct narratives about events for which they possessed little information. One gifted storyteller, ten-year-old Helen, spun tales about Pilgrims who sailed on a boat called the *Mayflower* (adding, "That's how we got 'April showers bring May Flowers' ") and settled at Plymouth Rock, located somewhere in Michigan's "upper peninsula."[98] To construct these stories, some children conflated information learned in school about different historical events, and then combined this mixture with snippets of information gleaned from cartoon shows or cultural celebrations such as Thanksgiving. VanSledright and Brophy concluded that children were able not only to construct imaginative stories about the past, but also to

see patterns in these stories, overarching themes of tragedy and suspense. In this sense, young children's narrative reconstructions may be viewed as partially formed precursors of the "emplotments" used by academic historians to narrate their stories of the past.[99]

Children's fanciful elaborations can be classified within what David Perkins has called a "content frame," a set of misunderstandings about specific eras and events in American history.[100] Rosalyn Ashby and Peter Lee addressed what Perkins calls the "epistemic frame," more general and sweeping beliefs that children use to interpret the past.[101] Rather than engaging children in interviews, the strategy used in their prior work,[102] they grouped adolescents into trios and videotaped their interactions as they worked through documents about Anglo-Saxon oath-helping and the ordeal. From hundreds of hours of videotape, Ashby and Lee created a set of categories to characterize children's "historical empathy," the "intellectual achievement" of "entertain[ing] a set of beliefs and values . . . not necessarily their own."[103] Students least able to do this saw history as a "*divi* past" (from the British slang for "thick, dumb, or mentally defective"), regarding the subject with "irritated incomprehension and contempt."[104] Students occupying the middle levels of the typology began to view history as an explanatory system but made little attempt to understand the past on its own terms. Only at the highest levels did children start to recognize differences between past and present mind-sets, or historical changes in *Zeitgeist* and *mentalité*. Although Ashby and Lee viewed their typology as a way of characterizing children's thinking about the past, it may also capture aspects of adults' thinking as well. Indeed, some evidence suggests that the notion of the "timeless past," the idea that concepts from the present can be easily transported back in time, is embraced by some university students—history majors and nonmajors alike.[105]

Reading History Textbooks

Recent research efforts have also focused on students' understanding of history textbooks. The earliest work in this area applied principles of text design to the writing of textbooks.[106] Bonnie Armbruster and Tom Anderson found that typical history books failed to offer readers "considerate" treatments, or ones in which explanations allowed the reader to determine (a) the goal of an action or event, (b) the plan for attaining that goal, (c) the action that was taken in response, and (d) the outcome.[107] If a text failed to address these issues, according to Armbruster and Anderson, it failed

"as a historical explanation."[108] Isabel Beck and her colleagues reached similar conclusions in a more extensive study.[109] They found that fifth-grade textbooks presumed background knowledge most children lacked. Like Armbruster and Anderson, Beck's team proposed rewriting history textbooks, using, in their words, "causal/explanatory" linkages, or linkages that connect a cause to an event and an event to a consequence.

Beck and her colleagues built on their work in text analysis to design passages that conformed to principles of cognitive text design. They conducted an experiment in which original text passages were compared with their rewritten counterparts.[110] For example, a textbook explanation about the French and Indian War that began, "In 1763 Britain and the colonies ended a 7-year war with the French and Indians," was rewritten to include material that established context and provided linkages between sentences. The new passage began, "About 250 years ago, Britain and France both claimed to own some piece of land, here, in North America."[111]

Researchers assigned 85 fourth- and fifth-grade students to original and revised text conditions and compared them according to their ability to recall ideas present in both forms. There was a statistically significant difference in recall (17 of 124 units in the original text condition versus 24 of 124 in the revised condition), providing modest support for the notion that textbooks can be revised to allow students to retain more information from them. An extension of this work showed that forty-eight fifth graders who were "provided with background knowledge" in an experimenter-led presentation were able to understand revised texts better than the originals.[112] This finding supported the notion that background knowledge helps most when readers are given well-structured texts.

The work on text design and analysis demonstrates that cognitive principles can be used to make history textbooks more "considerate." A more robust approach to improving students' understanding might teach students to deal with texts that are, by nature, inconsiderate. In a comparison of history textbooks and academic historical writing, Avon Crismore found that "metadiscourse," or indications of judgment, emphasis, and uncertainty, were used frequently in historical writing but typically edited out of textbooks.[113] For example, historians rely heavily on "hedges" to indicate indeterminacy, using such devices as modal auxiliaries ("may," "might"), certain verbs ("suggest," "appear," "seem"), and qualifiers ("possibly," "perhaps") to convey the

uncertainty of historical knowledge. But Crismore found that textbooks typically eliminated hedges. Such writing, she suggested, may be more "considerate," but it may also contribute to the finding that students often equate knowing history with "knowing the facts"[114] and approach their textbook with that singular goal in mind.[115] As Crismore observed:

> What happens to critical reading when attitudinal metadiscourse is delayed until adulthood and readers are not encouraged to become active participants in the reading process? . . . Young readers need to see author biases and evaluate them at an early age; textbooks and teachers need to teach them how to do this.[116]

Teaching

For the twenty-five years between 1950 and 1975, research on classroom teaching had a decidedly behaviorist cast that focused on discrete teaching acts like the frequency of classroom questions and the reinforcing qualities of teachers' responses. At the core of this approach was an assumption about the fundamental similarity among the school subjects. Variations in content were cast as "context variables" and emerged (if at all) in brief discussions about the limitations of research findings. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, research on teaching witnessed its greatest success in the teaching of discrete skills, in which a teacher checks for understanding on a concrete outcome and then guides students in doing similar problems or exercises. But as Barak Rosenshine noted in his analysis of a history lesson on Federalist No. 10, taught by then–Secretary of Education William Bennett, research on skill teaching had virtually nothing to say about the teaching of content: "We do not even have a good name for it. . . . How does one teach this content and these ideas? The skill model does not help us much."[117]

Stanford University's Lee Shulman called the lack of research on teaching content a "missing paradigm" and went on to develop a research program to address it.[118] The Knowledge Growth in Teaching Project (1983–89) was a longitudinal study that tracked changes in teachers' knowledge from the beginning of their teacher education programs into the first and second years of full-time teaching. An examination of the knowledge growth of four history/social studies teachers was one of the first research reports (see Chapter 6 of this volume) to emerge from this project.

Work on the relationship between subject matter knowledge and teaching was extended in a series of "Wisdom of Practice" studies in which eleven accomplished teachers were observed teaching a unit on the American Revolution. Teachers also engaged in a series of interviews, ranging from an "intellectual autobiography," in which they reconstructed the high points of their high school and college education, to modified think-alouds in which they verbalized their thoughts as they read Washington's Farewell Address, Federalist No. 84 (Hamilton's argument against a bill of rights), and other primary documents. (See Chapter 8 for examples of this work.)

Gaea Leinhardt, one of the first researchers to apply cognitive principles to research on teaching, has also made major contributions to understanding the skills that teaching history demands.[119] In a case study of an experienced history teacher based on over seventy-six sessions in an Advanced Placement U.S. history class,[120] Leinhardt focused on the teacher's historical explanations, distinguishing two main types. In "blocked explanations," the teacher provided a self-contained, relatively modular explanation. In "ikat explanations," the teacher gave an abbreviated account or made a passing reference to something that was later extended and elaborated. At the beginning of the school year, the teacher provided nearly all the explanations, as students struggled with notions of multiple causation in the ratification of the Constitution or the conflicting interpretations of a Beard or a Hofstadter. As the year went on, the teacher progressively drew students into the process of formulating explanations. One measure of her success was the proportion of student talk to teacher talk, which was about 40 percent at the beginning of the year and increased almost fourfold by the thirteenth week.

This increase in student participation had an important qualitative dimension as well. Students were not simply saying more in response to the teacher's explanations; the content of their responses was characterized by an ever-increasing complexity. By January, Paul, one of the students Leinhardt analyzed, had linked the fall of a cotton-based economy to British trade policy and colonial ventures in Asia as well as to the failure of southern leaders to read public opinion in Great Britain. Students were learning not only a body of factual material but also how to use this material to craft their own interconnected historical explanations.[121]

The work on teacher knowledge represents a significant departure from the research on teaching that characterized the 1970s and early 1980s. Researchers abandoned behavioral observation schemes for intensive interviews and focused observations of a small number of teachers. Rather than brief samples of an hour or two every six months, observations in these classes tried to preserve the flow of instruction, usually over a unit but, as in Leinhardt's case, sometimes for nearly half a year. This work also ventured into new methodological territory, borrowing and modifying methods more commonly found in the anthropologist's or sociolinguist's toolbox than in the psychologist's laboratory. Rather than attempting to formulate a theory of instruction that would hold for all subjects, these investigations aimed at generating theories of the middle range, narrower and more provisional theories that applied to the teaching of a particular subject, theories that might or might not have implications for teaching physics or physical education.[122] The focus of this work was not teacher behavior isolated from teacher thought, but the deep and fundamental nexus between what teachers know and what they do.

This research offers compelling portraits of exemplary teaching. But the strength of this work—its finely etched accounts of knowledge use in action—may also be its weakness. Like museum pieces that arrest the attention and focus it on the here and now, these images tell us more about what is than about how it came to be. Was the subject matter knowledge of these teachers a consequence of their undergraduate training or a covariate of it? How did these teachers learn to socialize students into history as a way of knowing? What did their failures look like, and how did they learn from them? Since no teacher is going to become a master by taking a two-day workshop on developing historical explanations, how do we alter teachers' deep-seated epistemic beliefs about the nature of history? This last question has special meaning, for at the core of this new work on teaching is the assumption that the lessons learned from experts can be used to teach novices. But how, exactly, do we turn portraits of excellence into programs that develop it? These are just some of the unanswered questions that arise from new research on teachers' subject matter knowledge in history.

CONCLUSION

Current research on history teaching and learning is characterized by diverse investigations that reflect the vigor of cognitive approaches. In

several areas, history has not been the final beneficiary of insights gleaned from research on other subjects, but the site where these insights first germinated and took root.

There are several reasons to think that the new interest in history is more than a passing fad. There is a growing recognition by educators and policymakers that questions of historical reasoning carry implications that go well beyond the curricular borders of history.[123] History offers a storehouse of complex and rich problems, not unlike those that confront us daily in the social world. Examining these problems requires an interpretive acumen that extends beyond the "locate information in the text" skills that dominate many school tasks. Understanding how students deal with such complexity, and how teachers aid them in doing so, would not only provide a knowledge base for improving school history but would also inform theories of reading comprehension, which are surprisingly mute about the processes used to form interpretations of complex written texts.[124]

Three additional developments promise to keep the spotlight on history. First, recent attention to narrative, which sees the formation of narrative as a "cognitive achievement,"[125] stands to gain much by extending its scope to the formation of historical narratives.[126] This topic is already being taken up with increasing self-awareness by professional historians, and psychologists would have much to contribute to this effort.[127] Second, new technologies such as hypermedia and computer data bases have created possibilities in history that were unimaginable a few years ago. A variety of efforts are under way that explore technology's role in enhancing historical understanding.[128] Finally, history has already been the site of new developments in student and teacher assessment and promises to continue to be a rich development site in the future.[129]

Psychologists interested in history have traditionally looked to the extensive body of historiographic writings for clues to the nature of historical thinking. This storehouse of essays and monographs, composed largely by historians and philosophers of history, looks at historical works not for what they disclose about the War of 1812, daily life in the Middle Ages, or the demise of French Indochina, but for what they say about historical knowing more generally.[130] The strategy of looking carefully at written histories and inferring from them the processes used in their composition offers many insights. The problem with using this approach to build a theory of teaching and

learning is that the final products of historical thinking can be explained by appealing to wholly different intermediate processes.[131] Historiography teaches us how to recognize skilled cognition but gives us scant advice for how to achieve it.

There is a second way to understand what it means to think historically. Less developed than the historiographic tradition, this approach examines the steps and missteps that lead to the formation of historical interpretations and conclusions. This work is carried out by researchers who conduct empirical studies into how students, teachers, and historians come to understand history.[132] It asks questions about what people know and how they come to know it. In so doing, this approach wrests questions of epistemology from the clouds and turns them into objects of empirical inquiry.[133]

Such research would hark back to the beginning of the twentieth century, when the American Psychological Association and the American Philosophical Society held joint meetings because the psychologist and the philosopher were often one and the same. As a research strategy, this approach would trace its intellectual ancestry not to Edward Thorndike, who displayed little patience with questions philosophical,[134] but to Wilhelm Wundt. Contrary to his popular image as an experimentalist singularly determined to establish psychology as an empirical science,[135] the lesser known Wundt was a man whose empirical investigations informed and were informed by his writings on epistemology, logic, and ethics, a man who argued that psychology and philosophy were so interdependent that, separated from one another, both would atrophy.[136] At its heart, historical understanding is an interdisciplinary enterprise, and nothing less than a multidisciplinary approach will approximate its complexity. In this regard, present efforts suggest that the future will be richer than the past.

NOTES

This chapter originally appeared in the *Handbook of Educational Psychology*, edited by Robert Calfee and David Berliner (New York, 1996). Since its appearance there has been an explosion of new work on teaching and learning history. Edited collections of this work include Peter N. Stearns, Peter Seixas, and Sam Wineburg, *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives* (New York, 2000), and James F. Voss and Mario Carretero, *Learning and Reasoning in History* (Portland, Oreg., 1998). See, as well, the special issues of the *Journal of Narrative and Life History* (1994, no. 4) and *Culture & Psychology* (1994, no. 1), both of which were edited by James V. Wertsch. Updated literature reviews include a short co-written piece, Richard Paxton and Sam Wineburg, "History Teaching," in the *Routledge International Companion to Education* (London, 2000); Suzanne M. Wilson, "Review of History Teaching," in Virginia Richardson, ed., *Handbook of Research on Teaching* (New York, 2001); and James Voss's "Issues in the Learning of History," *Issues in Education: Contributions from Educational Psychology* 4, no. 2 (1998), 163–209. The review that appears here has been updated slightly and edited for a general audience.

1. I limit my focus to work in English while recognizing that important work has appeared in other languages. See, for example, J. Pozo and Mario Carretero, "El Adolescente Como Historiador" [The adolescent as historian], *Infancia y Aprendizaje* 23 (1983), 75–90; Bodo von Borries, "Geschichtslernen und Persönlichkeits-entwicklung" [The learning of history and the development of self], *Geschichts-Didaktic* 12 (1987), 1–14; V. A. Kol'tsova, "Experimental Study of Cognitive Activity in Communication (with Specific Reference to Concept Formation)," *Soviet Psychology* 17 (1978), 23–38. For an overview of trends in history teaching in Europe and the Middle East, see Bodo von Borries, ed., *Youth and History: A Comparative European Survey on Historical Consciousness and Political Attitudes Among Adolescents* (Hamburg, Germany, 1997).

2. For example, Michael Frisch, "American History and the Structure of Collective Memory: A Modest Exercise in Empirical Iconography," *Journal of American History* 75 (1989), 1130–55; M. M. Miller and Peter N. Stearns, "Applying Cognitive Learning Approaches in History Teaching: An Experiment in a World History Course," *History Teacher* 28 (1995), 183–204; Peter Seixas, "Historical Understanding Among Adolescents in a Multicultural Setting," *Curriculum Inquiry* 23 (1993), 301–27; and Peter Seixas, "When Psychologists Discuss Historical Thinking: A Historian's Perspective," *Educational Psychologist* 29 (1999), 107–9.

3. Michelene T. H. Chi, Paul J. Feltovich, and Robert Glaser, "Categorization and Representation of Physics Problems by Experts and Novices," *Cognitive Science* 5 (1981), 121–52.

4. For an example of British work that predates this tradition, see Frances Collie, "The Problem Method in the History Courses of the Elementary School," *Journal of Experimental Pedagogy and Training College Record* 1 (1911), 236–39; and R. E. Aldrich, "New History: An Historical Perspective," in Alaric K. Dickinson, Peter J. Lee, and Peter J. Rogers, eds., *Learning History* (London, 1984), 210–24.

5. Edward L. Thorndike, *Educational Psychology—Briefer Course* (New York, 1923), 345.

6. Edward L. Thorndike, *Education: A First Book* (New York, 1912), 144.

7. G. Stanley Hall, *Educational Problems*, vol. 2 (New York, 1911), 285–86.

8. Ibid., 296.

9. Charles Hubbard Judd, *Psychology of High-School Subjects* (Boston, 1915), 384.

10. Committee of Seven, American Historical Association, *The Study of History in Schools* (New York, 1899).

11. Committee of Five, American Historical Association, *The Study of History in Secondary Schools* (New York, 1911).

12. Judd, *High-School Subjects*, 379.
13. J. Carleton Bell, "The Historic Sense," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 8 (1917), 317.
14. Ibid., 317.
15. Ibid., 318.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. J. Carleton Bell and David F. McCollum, "A Study of the Attainments of Pupils in United States History," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 8 (1917), 257–74.
19. Ibid., 257.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., 258.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., 268–69.
25. D. H. Eikenberry, "Permanence of High School Learning," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 14 (1923), 463–81.
26. Allan Nevins, "American History for Americans," *New York Times Magazine* (May 3, 1942), 6, 28–29; cf. Bernard DeVoto, "The Easy Chair," *Harper's Magazine* (June 1943), 129–32; Diane Ravitch and Chester E. Finn, Jr., *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know? A Report on the First National Assessment of History and Literature* (New York: 1987).
27. Chester E. Finn and Diane Ravitch, "Survey Results: U.S. 17-Year-Olds Know Shockingly Little About History and Literature," *American School Board Journal* 174 (1987), 32.
28. This characterization as "shameful" comes from Ravitch and Finn, *17-Year-Olds*, 201. See the parallels in a Canadian context, Jack Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto, 1998). For a penetrating critique of Granatstein's failure to consider his findings in a comparative context, see Chris Lorenz, "Comparative Historiography: Problems and Perspectives," *History and Theory* 38 (1999), 25–39.
29. Dale Whittington, "What Have 17-Year-Olds Known in the Past?" *American Educational Research Journal* 28 (1991), 759–80.
30. Garry C. Myers, "Delayed Recall in History," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 8 (1917), 275–83.
31. Ibid., 277.
32. Ibid., 282.
33. Ibid.
34. Garry C. Myers, "Confusion in Recall," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 8 (1917), 174; Francis C. Bartlett, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology* (New York, 1932).
35. Myers, "Confusion," 175. For an overview of Ebbinhaus's ideas, see Gordon H. Bower and Ernest R. Hilgard, *Theories of Learning*, 5th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1981).
36. Myers, "Confusion," 175.
37. David P. Ausubel, "The Use of Advance Organizers in the Learning and Retention of Meaningful Verbal Material," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 51 (1960), 267–72.

38. B. R. Buckingham, "A Proposed Index in Efficacy in Teaching United States History," *Journal of Educational Research* 1 (1920), 164.
39. M. J. Van Wagenen, *Historical Information and Judgment in Pupils of Elementary Schools* (New York, 1919).
40. Buckingham, "Proposed Index," 168.
41. Ibid., 170, emphasis in original.
42. Ibid., 171.
43. F. S. Camp, "Wanted: A History Scale Maker," *Journal of Educational Research* 2 (1920), 517.
44. Ibid., 518.
45. Ibid.
46. For example, C. L. Harlan, "Educational Measurement in the Field of History," *Journal of Educational Research* 2 (1920), 849–53; C. W. Odell, "The Barr Diagnostic Tests in American History," *School and Society* 16 (1922), 501–3; and L. W. Sackett, "A Scale in United States History," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 10 (1919), 345–48.
47. See R. B. Weaver and A. E. Traxler, "Essay Examinations and Objective Tests in United States History in the Junior High School," *School Review* 39 (1931), 689–95.
48. F. R. Gorman and D. S. Morgan, "A Study of the Effect of Definite Written Exercises Upon Learning in a Course of American History," *Indiana School of Education Bulletin* 6 (1930), 80–90.
49. Ibid., 90.
50. Ibid., 81.
51. Ibid., 90.
52. Raymond Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* (Chicago, 1962).
53. Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, England, 1988), 23.
54. Ibid.
55. Sackett, "A Scale," 348.
56. Cited in Novick, *Noble Dream*, 200.
57. Among the scattered and short-lived exceptions was the work of M. Clark, "The Construction of Exercises in the Use of Historical Evidence," in T. L. Kelly and A. C. Krey, eds., *Tests and Measurements in the Social Sciences* (New York, 1934), 302–39.
58. H. F. Arnold, "The Comparative Effectiveness of Certain Study Techniques in the Field of History," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 33 (1942), 449–57.
59. Robert M. Gagné, "The Learning Basis of Teaching Methods," in N. L. Gage, ed., *The Psychology of Teaching Methods: Seventy-fifth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (Chicago, 1976), 30.
60. Martin B. Booth, "Skills, Concepts, and Attitudes: The Development of Adolescent Children's Historical Thinking," *History and Theory* 22 (1983), 101–17. See Booth's update on developments in Great Britain, "Cognition in History: A British Perspective," *Educational Psychologist* (1994), 61–70, as well as Peter Lee,

"History Education Research in the UK: A Schematic Commentary," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, 1999.

61. E. A. Peel, "Understanding School Material," *Educational Review* 24 (1972), 164.

62. For example, E. A. Peel, "Some Problems in the Psychology of History Teaching: Historical Ideas and Concepts," in W. H. Burston and D. Thompson, eds., *Studies in the Nature and Teaching of History* (London, 1967), 159–72; and E. A. Peel, "Some Problems in the Psychology of History Teaching: The Pupil's Thinking and Inference," ibid., 173–90.

63. Roy N. Hallam, "Logical Thinking in History," *Educational Review* 19 (1967), 183–202.

64. For example, D. Case and J. M. Collinson, "The Development of Formal Thinking in Verbal Comprehension," *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 32 (1962), 103–11; see the references to other studies cited in E. A. Peel, "Experimental Examination of Some of Piaget's Schemata Concerning Children's Perception and Thinking, and a Discussion of Their Educational Significance," *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 29 (1959), 89–103.

65. Hallam, "Logical Thinking," 195.

66. Ibid.

67. See Martin B. Booth, "Ages and Concepts: A Critique of the Piagetian Approach to History Teaching," in Christopher Portal, ed., *The History Curriculum for Teachers* (London, 1987), 22–38.

68. Quoted in Booth, "Skills, Concepts, and Attitudes," 104.

69. Roy N. Hallam, "Piaget and Thinking in History," in M. Ballard, ed., *New Movements in the Study and Teaching of History* (London, 1970), 168. Peter Lee has recently reminded us that Hallam's research program embraced both historical and religious thinking, a fact that should temper this critique of Hallam's work. See Peter Lee, "History Across the Water: A U.K. Perspective on History Education Research," *Issues in Education: Contributions from Educational Psychology* 4 (1998), 211–20.

70. Margaret F. Jurd, "Adolescent Thinking in History-Type Material," *Australian Journal of Education* 17 (1973), 2–17; and Margaret F. Jurd, "An Empirical Study of Operational Thinking in History-Type Material," in J. A. Keats, K. F. Collis, and G. S. Halford, eds., *Cognitive Development: Research Based on a Neo-Piagetian Approach* (New York, 1978), 315–48.

71. Jurd, "Operational Thinking," 322.

72. Ibid.

73. See James West Davidson and Mark Hamilton Lytle, *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection* (New York, 1982); see also the extensive discussion of context in J. H. Hexter, *The History Primer* (New York, 1971).

74. See Bernard Bailyn, "The Problems of the Working Historian: A Comment," in Sidney Hook, ed., *Philosophy and History* (New York, 1963), 93–101; and Louis O. Mink (Brian Fay, Eugene O. Golob, and Richard T. Vann, eds.), *Historical Understanding* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1987).

75. Hallam, "Logical Thinking," 198.

76. Henry G. Macintosh, "Testing Skills in History," in Portal, *History Curriculum for Teachers*, 184.

77. John Fines, "Introduction," in Denis Shemilt, ed., *Schools Council History 13–16 Project* (Edinburgh, 1980), iii. Peter Lee believes that Piaget's influence on British history teaching has been exaggerated. See his "History Across the Water," 211–20.

78. G. R. Elton, "What Sort of History Should We Teach?" in Ballard, *New Movements in the Study and Teaching of History*.

79. H. Dawson, cited in L. W. Rosenzweig and T. P. Weinland, "New Directions of the History Curriculum: A Challenge for the 1980s," *History Teacher* 19 (1986), 263–77.

80. Denis J. Shemilt, *History 13–16: Evaluation Study* (Edinburgh, 1980).

81. Paul H. Hirst, "Liberal Education and the Nature of Knowledge," in R. S. Peters, ed., *Philosophy of Education* (Oxford, 1973), 87–101. Schools Council founders were influenced as well by notions of "structure of the disciplines" as formulated in Jerome Bruner's *Process of Education* (Cambridge, Mass., 1961).

82. Denis J. Shemilt, "The Devil's Locomotive," *History and Theory* 22 (1983), 15.

83. Shemilt, *History 13–16*. A "matched-pairs" design pairs a student in the new curriculum with a student similar in background and ability who has studied the traditional curriculum. It is a common research design in psychological experimentation.

84. Shemilt, "Devil's Locomotive," 7.

85. Shemilt, *History 13–16*, 20.

86. Ibid., 14.

87. Fines, "Introduction," ii.

88. Shemilt, *History 13–16*, 50–52.

89. See Matt T. Downey and Linda S. Levstik, "Teaching and Learning History," in James P. Shaver, ed., *Handbook of Research on Social Studies* (New York, 1991), 400–410.

90. Shemilt, *History 13–16*, 14.

91. Ibid., 76.

92. Ibid.

93. Howard Gardner is generally credited with inventing the term "cognitive revolution." See his readable history of the transition from behaviorism to cognitivism in *The Mind's New Science: A History of the Cognitive Revolution* (New York, 1985).

94. Ellen D. Gagné, *The Cognitive Psychology of School Learning* (Boston, 1985).

95. Gustav Jahoda, "Children's Concepts of Time and History," *Educational Review* 15 (1963), 87–104; R. N. Smith and P. Tomlinson, "The Development of Children's Construction of Historical Duration," *Educational Research* 19 (1977), 163–70. See also Downey and Levstik, "Teaching and Learning History," 400–410.

96. Gail M. Sinatra, Isabel L. Beck, and Margaret G. McKeown, "A Longitudinal Characterization of Young Students' Knowledge of Their Country's Government," *American Educational Research Journal* 29 (1992), 633–62.

97. Bruce VanSledright and Jere Brophy, "Storytelling, Imagination, and Fanciful Elaboration in Children's Historical Reconstructions," *American Educational Research Journal* 29 (1992), 837–61.

98. Ibid., 846.

99. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore, Md., 1973).

100. David N. Perkins and R. Simmons, "Patterns of Misunderstanding: An Integrative Model for Science, Math, and Programming," *Review of Educational Research* 58 (1988), 303–26.

101. Rosalyn Ashby and Peter J. Lee, "Children's Concepts of Empathy and Understanding in History," in Portal, *History Curriculum for Teachers*, 62–88.

102. See Alaric K. Dickinson and Peter J. Lee, *History Teaching and Historical Understanding* (London, 1978); and Alaric K. Dickinson and Peter J. Lee, "Making Sense of History," in Dickinson, Lee, and Rogers, *Learning History*, 117–54. Peter Lee, Rosalyn Ashby, and Alaric Dickinson have launched a major study into children's historical reasoning. See Peter Lee, Alaric Dickinson, and Rosalyn Ashby, "Just Another Emperor: Understanding Action in the Past," *International Journal of Educational Research* 27 (1997), 233–44.

103. Ashby and Lee, "Children's Concepts," 63.

104. Ibid., 68.

105. David Lowenthal, "The Timeless Past: Some Anglo-American Historical Preconceptions," *Journal of American History* 75 (1989), 1263–80.

106. For example, Bonnie J. F. Meyer, *The Organization of Prose and Its Effects on Memory* (New York, 1975); and T. A. van Dijk and Walter Kintsch, *Strategies of Discourse Comprehension* (New York, 1983).

107. Bonnie B. Armbruster and Tom H. Anderson, "Structures of Explanations in History Textbooks, or So What If Governor Stanford Missed the Spike and Hit the Rail?" *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 16 (1984), 247–74.

108. Ibid., 249.

109. Isabel L. Beck, Margaret G. McKeown, and Erika W. Gromoll, "Learning from Social Studies Texts," *Cognition and Instruction* 6 (1989), 99–158.

110. Isabel L. Beck, Margaret G. McKeown, Gail M. Sinatra, and J. A. Loxterman, "Revising Social Studies Texts from a Text-Processing Perspective: Evidence of Improved Comprehensibility," *Reading Research Quarterly* 26 (1991), 251–76.

111. Ibid., 257.

112. Margaret G. McKeown, Isabel L. Beck, Gail M. Sinatra, and J. A. Loxterman, "The Contribution of Prior Knowledge and Coherent Text to Comprehension," *Reading Research Quarterly* 27 (1992), 79–93.

113. Avon Crismore, "The Rhetoric of Textbooks: Metadiscourse," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 16 (1984), 279–96.

114. See expansions of this point in Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., "Demystifying Historical Authority: Critical Textual Analysis in the Classroom," *Perspectives: Newsletter of the American Historical Association* 26 (February 1988), 13–16; Carl N. Degler, "Remaking American History," *Journal of American History* 67 (1980), 7–25; James L. Lorence, "The Critical Analysis of Documentary Evidence: Basic Skills in the History Classroom," *History Teaching: A Journal of Methods* 8 (1983), 77–84.

115. J. D. McNeil, "Personal Meanings Versus Test-Driven Responses to Social Studies Texts," *Reading Psychology* 10 (1989), 311–19.

116. Crismore, "Rhetoric of Textbooks," 296. Richard J. Paxton has begun a research program that examines how students respond to textbooks that better approximate authentic historical writing. See Richard J. Paxton, " 'Someone with

Like a Life Wrote It': The Effects of a Visible Author on High School History Students," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 89 (1997), 235–50; and Richard J. Paxton, "A Deafening Silence: History Textbooks and the Students Who Read Them," *Review of Educational Research* 69 (1999), 315–39.

117. Barak Rosenshine, "Unsolved Issues in Teaching Content: A Critique of a Lesson on Federalist Paper No. 10," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 2 (1986), 301–8.

118. Lee S. Shulman, "Paradigms and Research Programs in the Study of Teaching: A Contemporary Perspective," in Merlin Wittrock, ed., *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1986), 3–36.

119. Gaea Leinhardt, "Expertise in Mathematics Teaching," *Educational Leadership* 43 (1986), 28–33; Gaea Leinhardt and James G. Greeno, "The Cognitive Skill of Teaching," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 78 (1986), 75–95.

120. Gaea Leinhardt, "Weaving Instructional Explanations in History," *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 63 (1993), 46–74.

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122. Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1968).

123. For example, Bradley Commission on History in Schools, *Building a History Curriculum: Guidelines for Teaching History in Schools* (Washington, D.C., 1988); California State Department of Education, *History–Social Science Framework for California Public Schools, K–12* (Sacramento, 1988); Bernard R. Gifford, *History in the Schools* (New York, 1988). For a recent example of research that examines sophisticated textual interpretation, see Joan Peskin, "Constructing Meaning When Reading Poetry: An Expert–Novice Study," *Cognition and Instruction* 16 (1998), 235–63.

124. See I. Athey and Harry Singer, "Developing the Nation's Reading Potential for a Technological Era," *Harvard Educational Review* 57 (1987), 84–93; and Walter Kintsch, "Learning from Text," *Cognition and Instruction* 3 (1986), 87–108.

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tional Researcher 20 (1991), 10–18; and Katheryn T. Spoehr and Luther W. Spoehr, "Learning to Think Historically," *Educational Psychologist* 29 (1994), 71–77. For exciting developments on the relationship between technology and history see http://historymatters.gmu.edu, as well as Randy Bass and Roy Rosenzweig, "Rewiring the History and Social Studies Classroom: Needs, Frameworks, Dangers, and Proposals" (U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., 1999).

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132. See note 2.

133. See Kenneth A. Strike and George J. Posner, "Epistemological Perspectives on Conceptions of Curriculum Organization and Learning," in Lee S. Shulman, ed., *Review of Research in Education* (Itasca, Ill., 1976), 10–141.

134. See Geraldine M. Joncich, *The Sane Positivist: A Biography of Edward L. Thorndike* (Middletown, Conn., 1968).

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II

CHALLENGES FOR THE STUDENT