

I Love History...But I Hated it in School!



***How America's Leaders and Educators are
failing to protect our democracy***

By

Alan N. Kay

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Young Heroes of History
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About the Author - Alan N. Kay

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Kay is known for creative teaching as well as creative writing. He is the initiator and coordinator of the Pinellas County History Day, and has taken students to the state level each year since 1999. Kay has also developed award-winning curriculum for teachers and given many workshops on education topics such as teaching the Civil War, using historical fiction in the classroom and how to participate in History Day.

Kay began writing children's historical fiction 15 years ago, is the author of a series of historical fiction books titled *Young Heroes of History*, has published a short book entitled *Jamestown Journey* and served as a consultant for the *Florida* historical album. He currently teaches American and World History at Dunedin High School in Florida.

For more information, see his website www.youngheroesofhistory.com

Why Am I giving this book away for Free?

What you are about to read is the result of over 100 hours of painstaking research, editing, re-editing and of course writing. I even created an entire website to help teachers, students and parents called www.ilovehistoryonline.com (Please feel free to utilize it!)

Unfortunately, due to events beyond my control (including the death of my editor as well as other tragedies) the delay in the releasing of this book has caused me to cancel my contract with my publisher.

The reason is quite simple: America is in a real crisis and I cannot take the time to search out a new publisher or wait any longer. In making this a free book, I hope to spread the word to many more people much more quickly.

Please feel free to print this book off and give to anyone you wish. I still maintain copyright and will continue to send it via pdf files and cd's as much as possible. As a teacher, I have many contacts in the education field and as an author of children's historical fiction, I also have contacts in the book industry. However, the word needs to be spread by more than just me. If you agree with my argument that America is indeed in a crisis and would like to contact me about this, or if you would like to help out in some way by helping with the distribution of this book, or if you would like to have me speak to your group, please contact me at historycrisis@youngheroesofhistory.com

Thank you for reading,

Sincerely,

Alan N. Kay

This book is dedicated to the hundreds of thousands of teachers in our country who have given their lives to the future of today's youth. Our country owes them a gratitude it can never repay.



"If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be."

Thomas Jefferson



"There is an old saying that the course of civilization is a race between catastrophe and education. In a democracy such as ours, we must make sure that education wins the race."

President John F. Kennedy

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Introduction

I LOVE HISTORY BUT I hated it in school. How many times have you heard an adult say that phrase? Perhaps you've also heard, *History was my worst subject.*

It's a frustrating and paradoxical situation our nation finds itself in and the problem is only getting worse. Adults love history. They watch movies about it, read books about it, and even join local re-enactment groups that recreate the past. Yet our children, our keepers of the flame so to speak, dread it.

Of course you've heard this before. You have heard about the problems with the nation's schools, you've heard about the abysmal knowledge students have of their own history and perhaps you even remember the political movements of the 1980s with *A Nation at Risk*¹ and other reports on the quality of American education. Criticism and analysis of American history education is not new.

So what can one lone history teacher contribute after so many studies and so many experts have had their say? At first, when I began my research and came across the volumes of literature on the subject, I felt there was nothing I could add. However, as I continued to read and I continued to teach I realized that as an author of historical fiction, and more importantly a teacher in the trenches, I did indeed have something to contribute. I realized the clarity with which I saw the problem. More importantly, as I continue to talk with parents and home educators, as I make speeches, presentations and do book signings, I see that parents are still mystified, confused and helpless. Many parents are unaware of the depth of their child's ignorance. Others who are aware of the problem find themselves unable to explain the reasons why. Worst of all, is that the majority of parents have simply resigned themselves to the fact that if their child is going to learn history, he or she will have to do it on their own.

This itself is an unacceptable situation and is more than enough reason for me to write this book. Unfortunately, this problem is only symptomatic of an even deeper crisis that we will discuss in detail. As Thomas Jefferson, Woodrow Wilson and many other great leaders recognized, the cornerstone of a functioning democracy is education. They also recognized that history education is the major proponent of our way of life and if it fails, then so do we. My arguments therefore, are not just directed at those trying to protect their own child but to all American citizens who are concerned with the future of our country. Yes, I know that sounds melodramatic and corny, but with history on my side, we will explore this problem in more detail and see that it is indeed true.

The purpose of this book then is not to rehash old news. Nor will I attempt to insult your intelligence by providing a quick and easy solution. However, while the solution is not an easy one, describing the problem is. As the book progresses, you will see first the nature of and importance of history so that in the later part of the book you will understand the various reasons for our problems in teaching it. I will use my experience as a teacher and author to try to succinctly describe the many levels and aspects of the problem so that by the end of the book, the solutions I present will be clear, concise and hopefully begin the process of change that is so needed.

The problems I will describe and the solutions you will read have all been well documented by countless hours of research by many of my colleagues in the education field. Unfortunately, as we will discuss in detail, part of the problem we have in this country is that the experts understand the problem, while the people who are most affected by it or can do something about it, do not. Therefore in an effort to make this book as readable to parents and everyday citizens as possible, I will refrain from *Eduspeak*, fancy acronyms and repetitive statistics.

Footnotes, extensive appendices, and a bibliography are provided at the end for those who want to learn more.

¹ The complete information is at <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/members.html>

Chapter One - We Love It

ADULTS LOVE HISTORY. I'm not talking about just being interested in it. They are interested in science. They find math necessary and perhaps even mandatory. They all recognize the importance of English and being able to write. Arguably there is no other subject however that holds as much power and fascination over adults as history does.

The Entertainment Factor: Books, Movies, and Television

THINK ABOUT IT. Adults read books on all kinds of history. Indeed just a few years ago, *John Adams* by David McCullough made it to number one on the New York Times Bestseller list for over a year. With all due respect to Mr. McCullough, whom I've met personally and whose list of historical works is breathtaking (many of which sit on my bookshelf behind me), but he is no Stephen King. His works are not meant to provide a quick escape from the everyday world as we sit around on our lounge chairs in the sun and curl up with a good book. My goodness the book is over 600 pages long and covers the life of a man who lived over 200 years ago.

Yet people bought the book by the millions, and the people who bought this book were not just your eggheads and history nuts. It seemed that every American was reading a history book. McCullough became the most sought after speaker at book fairs and other events while every Barnes and Noble, Waldenbooks and B. Dalton displayed the book at the front of the store. It seemed that people began to think if they weren't reading the book, they were missing something.

It doesn't end with *John Adams* though. Go into any bookstore and look for history books and you will find the largest section of any academic subject. Broken down into world history, American history, Civil War, World War II, biographies, specific country's histories and many others, the historical books at any store take up a significant portion of the shelves.

The influence of history spreads into the movies as well. There are the classics: *Gone With The Wind*, *The Longest Day*, *Midway* and the more recent: *Gettysburg*, *Amistad*, *Saving Private Ryan* and *Apollo 13*. Some people of course would say that not all these are history. They would look at movies like *The Patriot* and say that this is pure entertainment with so many misrepresentations and errors of history that they have no value.

Consider for a minute however that movies are where the love of history sometimes begins. Fascinated with the time period, people watch *The Patriot* and want to learn more. They rush home to the bookcase as I did and scan the pages for evidence of what they just viewed. They realize (at least most of them) that much if not all of the movie was fiction but this does not change the fact that they are now much more interested in the American Revolution and in history in general than they were before the movie began.

I am not going to make a long drawn out argument over the value of historical fiction in the movies however. That has been done before. For the sake of my point however, I would like you to accept that the success of historical movies or historical based movies in the public is obvious. Indeed, in my own study of the top fifty grossing movies of all time, a full ten percent of them were historical in nature.²

The most popular mode of entertainment in America is of course television and here history is not found lacking either. Television shows like *Bonanza* and *M.A.S.H.* that take place in the past have clearly been popular. Whether these are really history or not is irrelevant. Suffice it to say that when cable television first started to make in-roads into the television market, one of the first channels to be created was the History Channel. Back then, it seemed that the History Channel was more like the World War II channel. Fortunately, it has grown so popular today that not only does it have all kinds of history from war to modern marvels to holiday origins and the like but it has expanded into the History Channel International.

Beyond Entertainment

ADULTS' LOVE OF history goes far beyond entertainment, however. Hundreds of millions of them spend countless hours of research investigating their own family histories. Genealogy has become much more of a hobby

² This was as of 2002 according to *Movieweb*. (<http://movieweb.com/movies/boxoffice/alltime.php>) Since then the advent of DVD sales has skewed the results so that it is top heavy with recent movies.

today with the aid of the Internet and organizations such as the Church of Latter Day Saints. For those of you interested in your own family history, the Mormons have the largest free database of family history in the world.

People want to know where they came from. They want to know what their family did in the past. They want to know what it was like for them and they spend time and money investigating it. Just for fun, I typed in *family history* on my search engine and came up with over one thousand hits such as www.ancestry.com and www.familyhistory.com. The market is so lucrative that there are perhaps more rip off and scam artists out there charging money for free information than there are legitimate organizations.

Speaking of legitimate organizations gives rise to another group of adults whose love of family history has taken them to a whole other level. I am sure you have heard of the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution and the Sons and Daughters of the Confederacy. These groups are much more than an elite social clubs. Their primary reason for existence is an interest, love and respect for their own family history. However, having met with, spoken to and worked with these organizations personally, I have found them to be much more.

These family history organizations and the many others that exist take an active part in preserving the history of our country and in helping our young people. They sponsor programs, raise money to preserve historic sights, give gifts and awards and actively petition government leaders to include American history in their agendas.

Finally, let us not forget those unique adults that love history so much that they play history for real. I am talking of course of re-enactors. These people are so in love with history that it has become not only a part of their life but also a part of their personality. They go out on weekends, take time off of work and spend unheard of sums of money recreating history not only for entertainment but for educational purposes as well.

History and Adults

WHAT IS IT adults love about history and why is it so lost on our kids? We'll explore the kid's part of that question later in the book but for now, let's look at what history has to offer to adults.

As I so often tell my students, history is the best soap opera ever written and it's even better because it's all true. Take for example a terrible civil war in France in the 1500s that was actually called the War of the Three Henry's because all three factions had a Henry as it leader. The war ended when one Henry assassinated another, the second one took revenge for the killing of the first, and the only one left was the winner.

In England, another war was fought in part because a sea captain had his ear cut off and brought to the king. It was called the War of Jenkins Ear.

In Russia, the blood disease, hemophilia, in a small boy led to the invitation of a crazy, orgy-crazed monk into the private court of the Czar. This holy man named Rasputin could somehow hypnotize the boy into a strange calm. He so captivated the royal family that they became blinded to the problems of the country. The Russian Revolution, the Cold War and the spread of worldwide communism we learn was in part due to the health of one little boy. And finally, there is Henry the VIII. We all love to hear about his many wives and explore the realization that hundreds of millions of Anglicans would still be Catholics if one sperm had simply taken a different path and given Henry a boy instead of a girl.

Perhaps the most mystical, eerie, almost divine story in history is the story of the deaths of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, the second and third presidents of the United States and signers of the Declaration of Independence. Separated by political philosophies as well as hundreds of miles both men died on the exact same day within hours of each other. The day just happened to be July 4th on the 50th anniversary of our country's birth. If Hollywood tried to tell the stories that history does, it would be laughed out of business.

The stories of course are amazing, unbelievable, entertaining, tragic, and of course true. Actually, we're not sure if they are true and we argue about that as well which opens up a whole other field called historiography, the study of the study of history. Remember the whole issue of Sally Hemmings and Thomas Jefferson? Did our illustrious president, author of the Declaration of Independence, renowned architect, and founder of the University of Virginia actually have a child with one of his slaves? The debate rages on not only between academics and genetics experts but between descendants over what really is the truth.

I once heard a local sports radio announcer obviously talking out of his field when he commented that history teachers have it easy because the past doesn't change. If only he knew how much our job changes and how much rewriting occurs in the history field. Take for instance, the recently revealed identity of Deep Throat. For over thirty years a secret was hidden from the American people that led to countless books, articles and even college projects designed around discovering who was so instrumental in forcing the resignation of President Richard Nixon. Now that the truth is known books will be rewritten, television pundits will discuss the issues and people will debate whether the man was a hero.

Did the South have the right to secede? Who really discovered America? Did Pocahontas know John Smith?

Who killed John F. Kennedy? Were the Rosenbergs spies and what really happened to Anastasia? History not only tells us stories and presents mysteries but even the conclusions that we come to and the facts as we know them are constantly open to debate and discussion.

Why doesn't this excite our kids? After all, everyone loves a good mystery.

To adults, knowing history is the one of the first signs of intelligence. People seem to pride themselves on their knowledge of historical facts; the more obscure the better. If you doubt it, then find some obscure historical fact and the next time you are at a dinner party find a time to introduce your fact to the crowd. You'll instantly be seen as an intellectual and gain a notch or two in respect. For example, "speaking of presidents, did you know that George Washington was not the first president of the United States?" It was actually a man named John Dickinson who was the president under the Articles of Confederation during the Revolution.

This is unique to the history field. If you were to try the dinner party trick with a science fact like "did you know that time stops at the edge of the event horizon in a black hole" or maybe even some comment on discrete mathematics, you certainly would not get the same reaction from your friends. They may respect you more, nod their heads and say, *really, that's amazing*, but they would not try to match you with their own knowledge.

Cultural Literacy

To many of us, history seems to be the first measure of intelligence. While math and science get all the attention in the education field and government leaders call for better math and science scores, adults are always trying to increase their knowledge of history. When it comes to information that people want to know it seems that the first place adults start with is history.

As part of the proof of this point, consider the work of E.D. Hirsch Jr. You may remember his national best selling book from 1988, *Cultural Literacy, What Every American Needs To Know*. It was quickly followed by a series of books *What Every 1st Grader Needs to Know*, followed by books for a 2nd grader, 3rd grader, 4th grader, and etc., as well as a *Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*. These books were best sellers because American parents wanted their children to know the important facts needed to be smart. Hirsch's thesis in his *Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* was that in order to effectively communicate and function in our literate modern society, a person needed to be able to understand and use the vocabulary of the educated. He discussed how in everyday language and newspaper articles words are often used which people can only understand if they have a proper understanding not only of language but of history.

"Just having the right to vote is meaningless if a citizen is disenfranchised by illiteracy or semi literacy. Illiterate and semi literate Americans are condemned not only to poverty, but also to the powerlessness of incomprehension. Knowing that they do not understand the issues, and feeling prey to manipulative oversimplifications, they do not trust the system of which they are supposed to be the masters. They do not feel themselves to be active participants in our republic, and they often do not turn out to vote. The civic importance of cultural literacy lies in the fact that true enfranchisement depends upon knowledge, knowledge upon literacy, and literacy upon cultural literacy."³

While I do not agree with everything Hirsch says in his books, certainly the popularity of his books proves the importance parents place on their child's education. Obviously millions of Americans believe that there is a body of knowledge that they should know in order to function in society. Beginning as early as kindergarten, it is clear that a significant portion of this body of knowledge is historical in nature.

Revisionism

UNFORTUNATELY, DUE TO the failure of our public schools in teaching students their history, most Americans learn their history from books like Hirsch's and other outside sources. While everything I have said above makes it clear that Americans watch, read and replay history in their everyday lives, this can lead to great dangers in our society due to the power of history.

They say for example that those who don't know their history are doomed to repeat it. I would argue however that those who think they know their history are just as, if not more, dangerous. Unguided, haphazard historical lessons can lead to the wrong conclusions. Many thousands of people who follow hate groups or who preach that the Holocaust did not happen are just the extremes of this example.

Have you heard of Holocaust revisionism? It is a philosophy that preaches that the Holocaust did not happen as an organized Nazi plot to wipe out the Jews. Instead, these amateur historians, who are led by some intelligent but

³ Hirsch, E.D. Jr., *Cultural Literacy*. Vintage Books, New York: 1988., p. 12.

misguided individuals, profess to claim that the very idea of the Holocaust was invented by the Jews to gain sympathy and therefore tacit approval for their policies in Israel. They claim that the Nazis unintentionally slaughtered Jews due to the inevitability of war. They use this idea to further anti-Semitism and the power of hate groups. There has even been a revival of literature claiming that slavery was not that bad in the United States compared to the way northern workers were treated in the cities.

Here we see that the danger of knowing your history badly can be even worse than not knowing it at all. History's power to influence what we think is firmly grounded in fact. After all, as human beings the only conclusions we can make about life and about how humans behave is based upon what we believe to be the truth. If the truth is not presented to us accurately or in the above case is warped to meet a political agenda, then history's power to control what we think can become overwhelming.

We have already seen this in history. The Germans, perhaps more than any other nation, understood the power of history and its ability to control human behavior. In the 1860s, as part of the attempt to unify the multitude of German states into one German nation, people such as Otto Von Bismarck recognized the power of history to instill nationalism in their people.

Indeed Adolph Hitler was a by-product of Bismarck's plans. Hitler, perhaps the most reviled and infamous man of all time is commonly seen as a freak of nature and a madman who misled an entire nation. This belief not only shows people's lack of real historical knowledge but it leaves out the awesome power history held over Hitler and Germany. During the time of Hitler's youth, again the latter half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, German history was taught very much along the lines of what would later become the philosophies Hitler preached. Under the influence of Heinrich Von Treitschke, a university professor, Prussian State Historian and a member of the Reichstag, German history was rewritten and re-taught in a whole new light. An entire generation of German youth, Hitler's generation, grew up learning the nationalistic, militaristic, authoritarian spin on history that Von Treitschke so highly proclaimed.

Hitler therefore did not mold an entirely new German nation. He took a group of people who had already been molded in the history classes of the nation and took them to another level. Adding his own spin on history and using the power of the state and propaganda to further his message, Hitler took the German people on a rampage that changed the very nature of our world and how we see ourselves.

This connection between history and nationalism is symbiotic. Nationalism cannot exist without an appreciation and love of your country's history, whether that history be true or not, and history's appreciation and interest grows with a growth in nationalism. During World War I, when nationalism in Europe was at its height, millions of Europeans threw themselves into the trenches and died in numbers never seen before or since. It is no coincidence that the famous World War I movie, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, begins with a scene in which a history teacher is convincing his boys to enlist.

Revisionism versus Historical Perspective

TODAY HISTORY'S POWER is hidden by a simpler, less intrusive term. It's called historical perspective. This is unfortunately a misleading term. It gives the impression that history is something to be debated in classrooms and discussed on the television and by the political pundits from Larry King to Oprah Winfrey. Yet while history is supposed to be debated and discussed in all these circles, we sometimes overlook the power history has because of this benign view of it.

There is no better example of the awesome destructive power of history today than terrorism. Again, calling it historical perspective, we see that certain individuals in the world have looked at their history and come to conclusions that we find abhorrent. Let's consider for a minute the way history is taught to many students in the Middle East.

In the year 1095, Pope Urban II called for the First Crusade to liberate the Holy Land. This invasion of Muslim lands began a series of long drawn out wars between Christians and Muslims in which the Christian nations of Europe repeatedly attacked and killed Muslims in an attempt to take away their land. Saladin was the name of the man many Muslim students revere as the great leader who sent the Europeans into the sea and freed the Muslim world from their influence.

Hundreds of years passed and again the Europeans returned this time posing as friends. After World War I, they split up the Ottoman Empire and claimed that the Muslims living there were not capable of ruling themselves and would have to live under the Europeans' protection. After World War II, supposedly convinced that the Muslim nations had finally matured enough to be granted political independence, the Europeans removed their armies and governments, leaving their money and influence behind, not to mention the state of Israel.

Whether you agree with this spin on history or not, it is what many millions of Arabs learn. The facts are all

there to be interpreted in this way and yet we innocently say it is all just a matter of perspective. Yet this perspective has led hundreds of people to volunteer their very lives as suicide bombers in their desire to confront the Westerners. Screaming the name of Allah, flying a gas-laden plane into the twin towers, a handful of these terrorists changed our world.

Speaking of the State of Israel, we are led to one last proof of the power of history. Nowhere else on earth is a land so contested. One could argue that a majority of the terrorism in this world is tied in one way or another to the Israeli/Palestinian question. Three religions claim the land as their own and all three religions look to their history as proof of their claim. It seems therefore, no stretch of the imagination at all to conclude that history has the power to make people act as heroes, villains, soldiers, nurses and even suicide bombers.

History has not only been used to create or destroy entire nations, it has even helped foster philosophies. One obvious example is the way that history can be written to defend a particular viewpoint. I am talking here of the Marxist/Leninist version of history. As you may be aware, most historians place emphasis on a particular part of history, there are military historians, social historians, political, economic and so forth. Karl Marx and his proponents Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and Mao Tse-tung went on to write a version of history that defined, and still defines, an entire way of life.

Marxist/Leninist history sees the world as a continuous struggle between the oppressive bourgeoisie and the oppressed worker. Everything can be defined in a manner of economics and class struggle. The French Revolution, World War I and all the major conflicts of the last 500 years can be interpreted as a struggle between the competing imperialistic, capitalistic powers of the world. Again we see, without belaboring the point, that the mere interpretation and presentation of history has changed our world.

The Power of History

AS ADULTS AND specifically as Americans, we realize all of this. In fact, this is our second reason for our love of history. We recognize and respect this power that it has and want to try to control it as much as we can. Yet recognition of its power does not make Americans immune to arguments over its interpretations. Today for example, the people of Georgia argue over whether to have a Confederate flag fly from the top of their state capital. Both sides use the same history to come to different conclusions.

Our deadliest war ever fought, in which more Americans died than in all other wars combined, was fought over history. Both sides in the American Civil War used the same history to defend their cause. Southerners looked to 1776 and felt they were fighting the second American Revolution. South Carolina's Declaration of Independence from the United States purposely mirrors that of Thomas Jefferson's. President Abraham Lincoln, who the Confederates compared to King George III, justified the war as the only way to preserve a union that Americans fought and died for in 1776. How many soldiers fought and died in that war because they felt an obligation to their ancestors, a duty to their country born directly from their history?

Even after General Robert E. Lee surrendered and Reconstruction began, both sides continued the fight in the history books. Northerners called it the Civil War, and since they won, that is what is taught in the textbooks. Southerners called it many things like the Second American Revolution, the War of Northern Aggression and, the most well known, War Between the States. The debate continues today. It is a healthy debate, a discussion that makes us aware of the power of historical perspective and the many ways that history can be used.

Chapter Two - We Need It

THE UNITED STATES of America is by far the most unique country on the planet. With the largest and most versatile mixture of ethnic groups in the world, we find ourselves searching for a common bond to tie us together. We have neither a common religion nor a common ancestry. We were not settled by one particular tribe or ethnic group and we were not established by any one power. We all came here for different reasons and we all found different opportunities when we got here.

What keeps us all together? Not all of us celebrate Christmas. Not all of us believe in one God. Many of us do not even speak the same language.

The Bond of History

HISTORY IS THE glue that binds Americans together. It is not a single agreed upon history that is for sure. As discussed in the previous chapter, we still argue over perspective and even names. Think of our major holidays however. On July 4th Americans of every ethnic group, black, white, Christian, Muslim, Indian and Chinese, celebrate the independence of our country. On Thanksgiving some people eat turkey, others go vegetarian, some volunteer in neighborhood shelters, others watch football and many families mix it all together. Regardless of the food we eat, we all take time to stop and say *Thank you* for what we have, no matter what god we believe in.

It is our history that establishes our culture and keeps it going. Of course it is not a rosy history; no country can claim to have a clean slate. The history we speak of is a story of the struggle towards equality, the attempts made, the victories and the defeats in the name of freedom. It is this idea, this pursuit of freedom that defines us as Americans and makes us unique in the world. Without our history, we are not a people.

Why is it, for example, that so many parents and grandparents complain that the youth of today don't appreciate their country? We often hear that this generation has no patriotism or appreciation for the sacrifices of the past. Whether the topic is Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement or World War II, Korea and Vietnam, our young people have no concept of what these people did for us. Some of this is because of the way history is taught in schools. Some of it is because of the nature of our history itself. Many students, and some teachers, mistakenly believe that American history is all about repression, selfishness, imperialism and slavery. This perception has caused thousands of American students to be turned off to history before they've even begun.

Nationalism versus Patriotism

IT IS NO revelation to point out that our students' lack of interest in our history is the root cause of their lack of patriotism. The less our students know about their history, the less willing they are to appreciate and love our country. Just as it took nationalism to motivate millions of European boys to go to war in 1914, it also takes nationalism and patriotism to motivate the youth of America.

Yet, it's not all about nationalism. After all, many intelligent people would successfully argue that nationalism is the reason for all of our troubles in the world today. It led to both World Wars and is one of the major factors in the struggles in the Middle East today. If we are to survive as a country however, there must be some sense of nationalism in our youth. Not the kind of nationalism that will cause them to go off to war and to say *my country right or wrong*, but the kind of nationalism that goes beyond America. We want our children to appreciate freedom, to recognize the important sacrifices that sometimes must be made in its name and to value that freedom so much that they want to help it spread to all corners of the globe. We want them to respect individuals' rights and to realize that a responsibility to the greater community comes with these rights.

The Responsibility of Education

IN ESSENCE, WE want our children to be like us. This is one of the two primary responsibilities of education. Ask any educator or politician what the priority of education is and they will correctly say it is about giving students the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in our world. In the back of our minds however, we all know that education is also about the survival of our culture. Americans want America to survive. We want America to be recognizable to us when we are grandparents. We hope that if we somehow could come back in several hundreds

years, that America would still stand for freedom, democracy and the rights of the individual.

Unfortunately this is not happening. Many of our children do not appreciate freedom and democracy the way we do. Politicians, lobbyists, educators, intellectuals and concerned citizens all across the country are calling for action. They notice the change in our society and it disturbs them. We turn on the TV or the radio, we open up a newspaper to another school shooting or juvenile delinquency and we wonder what is happening to America. (I'd like to point out here that I am not a negative person. Quite the contrary, I have taught so many wonderful youths over the years that I am quite encouraged about the future of America if we can deal with the problems I am addressing in this book.)

I am not so naïve or self-absorbed however to attempt to claim that everything wrong with American youth is all the result of a lack of history education on the part of American youth. Our society's ills are much more complex than that. What I am arguing however, is that if we want our youth to appreciate the same values of democracy and freedom that we do, then the only way to do this is through a love of country that only can be found in our history.

This very issue is even more important to America because of the nature of our democracy. In the very season of our birth as a nation, Thomas Jefferson was writing on the importance of history to the survival of our government:

“Education allows the people to be the guardians of their own liberty. For this purpose the reading in the first stage where they will receive their whole education is proposed as has been said to be chiefly historical. History, by apprising them of the past, will enable them (students) to judge of the future; it will avail them of the experience of other times and other nations; it will qualify them as judges of the actions and designs of men; it will enable them to know ambition under every disguise it may assume and knowing it, to defeat its views.”⁴

Historical education, Jefferson realized, was the most fundamental tool in the successful establishment of a democracy. How can a citizen vote responsibly and accurately if he has no historical knowledge? How can he, as Jefferson points out, recognize ambition and defeat it if he does not have the skills learned in the study of human ambition, deceit, successes and failures?

Education of the Electorate

A DEMOCRACY IS only as good as its voters and its voters are only as good as their education. Does anyone today have confidence in the American voting public when actors, wrestlers and Klansmen are so regularly elected? What do future elections hold in store for us if our education system continues to fail?

Yet how does history education help students recognize ambition? What exactly was Jefferson getting at? He certainly wasn't alone in his concerns. In 1892, Woodrow Wilson sat on what was called the Committee of Ten, which was the first national committee to recommend curricula for all the high schools subjects, both classic and modern. They wrote:

“History and its allied branches are better adapted than any other studies to promote the invaluable mental power which we call judgment.”⁵

What is it about history that is so valuable? Isn't it just about learning who did what to whom and when? Unfortunately, in many American classrooms today that is what history is about and that is why it is failing. However, when taught correctly, when taught the way Presidents Jefferson and Wilson intended, history becomes not a class where students memorize but a place where they learn to analyze, to judge, to reason and to relate.

In becoming historians, students begin with learning the story but progress too much more. They begin to think critically. They ask why, not just what and when. They recognize motives, they analyze situations and they try to explain to themselves and their peers why human beings would do the things they do. If taught correctly, they even learn to recognize inaccuracies and misinterpretations and even lies in history. When they are able to do all of this,

⁴ Jefferson, Thomas *Notes on Virginia. Works, Memorial Edition II, 206-207.* (Found in Nevins, Alan. *The Gateway to History.* Anchor Books, Garden City New York:1962. p. 17)

⁵ *Report of the Committee of Ten.* 1892. Available on-line <http://www.blancmange.net/tmh/books/commofTEN/mainrpt.html>.

then they become the kind of citizen necessary for a working democracy.

On a more individual scale, students who learn their history are also able to use it in their own lives. "History," as said by Dr. Allan Nevins, Professor Emeritus of American History at Columbia University after World War II, "is a bridge connecting the past with the present, and pointing the road to the future."⁶ The study of history, therefore, allows a student to recognize patterns, to understand the nature of humanity and upon understanding that nature, to be better able to anticipate their actions in the future.

Indeed Professor Isaac Asimov was so impressed with the power of history to predict upcoming events, that in his famous *Foundation* novels he created a study called psycho-history that combined the knowledge of history with psychology in order to accurately and scientifically predict the future.

This skill of recognizing human behavior patterns better allows students to deal with the unexpected. It can give them peace of mind when they realize that other people have survived and dealt with situations similar to their own. It can provide them guidance to deal with the problem and even provide possible solutions.

Presidents, perhaps more than other people, use history in this way. The most recent example is of course how President George W. Bush dealt with the tragedy of September 11, 2001. Using the example of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the president saw many eerie similarities including the surprise, the shock and even the number of deaths. To his credit, the president recognized that the tragedy would evoke fear and hatred of Muslims. In remembering his history, however, he did not want a repeat of the Japanese internment camps of World War II and in so doing, helped Americans avoid a repeat of an embarrassing era in our history.

His father, President George H.W. Bush, also used history as his guide in dealing with Saddam Hussein. The comparisons, Bush claimed, between Hussein and Hitler were too powerful to be ignored. In his speeches, Bush specifically and purposely stated that we cannot appease the dictator. This was a clear reference to the failed appeasement policies of Europe in the 1930s. Then, once Kuwait was freed and the president decided to not invade Iraq, he justified his actions by declaring to the American public that this would not be another Vietnam. In November 2002, his son, picking up where the father left off, continued to make references to the failed League of Nations in his justification for further attacking Hussein.

Here we see the danger of history as well. In using it as a guide, we can recognize patterns, avoid repeated mistakes and perhaps bring forth a brighter future. However, when over using it, when finding similarities that are not there, we can sometimes make our mistakes even greater.

This is not to say that both President George H.W. Bush and President George W. Bush were wrong in their assessments. Critics of the presidents have said that Hussein is not another Hitler and that the situation is very different. In debating over what to do about Iraq in the summer of 2003, senators stood on Capital Hill and argued that Hussein's Iraq was more like Fidel Castro's Cuba than it was Hitler's Germany.

The Personal Value of History

FORTUNATELY, OUR STUDENTS do not need to worry about the fate of the country single handedly. For them, history can be put to a more personal use. That is not to say that they will be spared situations like war, plagues and other disasters. History involves much more than that. Instead, if they learn history properly, they will see individual situations and learn about human relations. Perhaps they will see a boy who lost his father and was able to move on, a woman who defied the odds, a man who failed or a family broken up. History can then become inspirational. It can empower individuals not only with knowledge but also with recognition of their own abilities and the potential of the human spirit. Just as President George W. Bush was more prepared to deal with the unexpected, so too will they.

Not only will the student benefit, but we as a country, as a society benefit as well. Through practiced interpretation and analysis of the past, students who become adults and voters will be better able to sort out lies. In seeing individuals succeed in history and in trying to understand people in their own time period they will learn not to jump to conclusions. They will see the people in the past as individuals, not just as some *dead guy in a history book*. And, in seeing them as people, they will learn to recognize that perhaps, if they had been in that situation, that they might have acted in a similar way.

Finally, by learning to understand these people in the past, they will learn not to judge them and in learning not to judge them, they will learn not to judge each other. Yes it may sound corny, but as I have seen in my own history classes if students learn not to judge the past and learn not to judge each other, they become more tolerant of diversity and more accepting of each other and we all have a more peaceful country.

History's Value

⁶ Nevins, Alan. *The Gateway to History*. Anchor Books, Garden City New York:1962. p. 14

IN A SPEECH by David McCullough in 1995 entitled “Why History,” McCullough gave his own opinion regarding the value of history:

“I’m convinced that history encourages, as nothing else does, a sense of proportion about life, gives a sense of the relative scale of our own brief time on earth and how valuable that is.”⁷

In reading a column in the Washington Post several years ago, I came across a writer who felt that everyone was overreacting because Johnny did not know history. He claimed that the soldiers on D-day perhaps did not know their history, that the dates and names of the past did not help a person in doing his daily job or in becoming a hero in a war or in dedicating himself to his country. History facts, he wrote, make great trivia but they provide little value to real life.

This man does not know what history is. Historians have never argued that knowing 1776, 1812, 1939, December 7, 1941, Harriet Tubman or Andrew Jackson will somehow make our children better people or better Americans. In this world of the Internet, computer and hand held data access, facts are simple to find.

The value of history is in the skills it provides us. The value of history is in the understanding of humanity and our place in the world. It is being able to comprehend who we are, where we come from and perhaps even why we exist. If a student is taught these skills, if he has a teacher or a parent or a book that can engage him and teach him the way history should be taught, then he will be able to not only know ambition under every disguise but he will be a better voter, a better citizen and a better human being. And after all, isn’t that what we want for our children?

⁷ McCullough, David. *Why History*. National Book Awards Ceremony. Simon and Schuster, The Plaza Hotel, New York City, November 15, 1995.

Chapter Three - What Is The Problem?

IT'S TIME TO GET specific. We've bounced around the problem that our kids lack history knowledge and/or skills. Since you've picked up this book, you've probably heard some of the scary statistics out there about our kid's history knowledge. Well, if I am going to base this book on the premise that they are not learning their history, I better provide some proof. Here it is.

Facts and Statistics

A SURVEY COMMISSIONED in 2002⁸ by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation asked over 1000 U.S. teenagers aged 12-17 about basic fourth grade level history questions. The results show that students don't know some basic history facts. For example:

- 22% of teens don't know what country America declared independence from during the Revolutionary War (14%t thought it was France);
- 17% don't know that there were 13 original colonies;
- 15% don't know that the Declaration of Independence was adopted on July 4, 1776 by the Continental Congress;
- 31% don't know who wrote "The Star Spangled Banner"
- 24% don't know who fought in the Civil War.⁹

In an article submitted to Reuters news magazine on May 9th 2002, Sue Fleming reported the following:

More than half of America's high school seniors do not have even the most basic grasp of U.S. history, showing no improvement in a nationwide test since 1994, the U.S. Education Department said on Thursday.

The department's national history "report card" measured the performance in 2001 of fourth, eighth and 12th graders in history, knowledge that is important for immigrants applying for U.S. citizenship.

Students did not know, for instance, that America's fundamental belief in individual liberty was expressed in the Declaration of Independence or that the image of Uncle Sam was used to appeal to patriotism during wartime.

Educators said the results were "truly abysmal," pointing out that the higher the grade and closer a student was to voting age, the lower the understanding of U.S. history....

In grade 12, the final year of school, only 43 percent of students had a basic or proficient knowledge of history...

More than a third of fourth graders and nearly 40 percent of eighth graders also did not have a basic understanding of the subject...

"May I remind you that 'basic' is the bottom of the achievement ladder? And they didn't even reach that—the lowest rung," Education Secretary Rod Paige told a news conference.

"This is unacceptable. History is a critical part of our nation's school curriculum, and it is through history that we understand our past and contemplate our future," he added.¹⁰

Finally in a Rose Garden speech on September 17, 2002, President George W. Bush said:

⁸ Author's note: I recognize that this data is four years old. Unfortunately due to circumstances beyond our control, publication of this book was delayed. I have researched scores and surveys as recently as 2005 and have not found any new information or data to contradict what you are about to read.

⁹ Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Story submitted by PR Business Wire.

http://www.prnewswire.com/broadcast/5027/5027_consumer.html

¹⁰ Copyright © 2002 Reuters Limited.

Recent studies tell us that nearly one in five high school seniors think that Germany was an ally of the United States in World War II. Twenty-eight percent of eighth graders do not know the reason why the Civil War was fought. One-third of fourth graders do not know what it means to “pledge allegiance to the flag.” Graduating seniors at some of our leading colleges and universities cannot correctly identify words from the Gettysburg Address, or do not know that James Madison is the father of the Constitution.¹¹

In recognizing these problems, the president along with Secretary of Education Rod Paige and other officials set up three new programs to improve the history education in America’s schools. These programs were

- We the People, an initiative administered by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to encourage and strengthen the teaching, study, and understanding of American history and culture.
- Our Documents, an innovative project that will be run by the National Archives and the National History Day program. This project will use the Internet to bring one hundred of America’s most important documents from the National Archives to classrooms and communities across the country, provide lesson plans, and to foster competitions and discussions about these defining moments in our history.
- A White House forum on American history, civics, and service to be held in the early months of 2003.¹²

The U.S. Congress has also gotten into the act. In Resolution 451 of the 107th Congress (October 1st 2002) they found that:

1. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) United States History Assessment of 2001 found that 89 percent of high school seniors, 84 percent of 8th graders, and 82 percent of 4th graders scored below ‘proficient’ levels.
2. The results of the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress Civics Assessment showed that 77 percent of all 4th graders sampled scored below ‘proficient’ levels and showed similar results for 8th and 12th graders, with approximately three-fourths of students at both grade levels scoring below ‘proficient’ levels.
3. The 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress Civics Assessment showed that one-third of 4th graders could not explain the meaning of ‘I pledge allegiance to the flag’ on a multiple-choice test and a majority of 4th graders could not answer why ‘citizens elect people to make laws for them’ in a democracy;
4. In 1999, the United States placed 6th in the International Civic Education (CivEd) Study, a study of 27 countries sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) designed to tap the civic knowledge and skills of 14-year-olds and their attitudes toward democracy and citizenship.
5. According to the CivEd study, 12 percent of students in the United States reported never or hardly ever studying history in school, and the majority of 9th graders typically spent less than one hour per week doing history homework;
6. According to the Center for Survey Research and Analysis, fewer than half of the seniors surveyed at

¹¹ Bush, President George W. *President Introduces History & Civic Education Initiatives*. White House Press Release, September 17, 2002. Source <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020917-1.html>.

¹² Bush, President George W. *President Introduces History & Civic Education Initiatives*. White House Press Release, September 17, 2002. Source <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020917-1.html>.

top universities across the United States can identify crucial events in United States history.¹³

Their reaction was not as bold as the president's however they too called for action to improve the learning of American history in our schools.

Obviously, I am not the only one stating that there is a problem. Indeed I could have gone on to produce all the statements made in the media, the historical organizations who've researched the problem and the famous authors such as David McCullough who have spoken on the issue. For the sake of brevity however, I am going to assume that you will recognize that we do have a problem.

Wait, some of you may be saying. Most of the information you presented described the facts Americans did not know. Yet, in your second chapter, you argued that history was not about the facts but that it was about the skills learned in analyzing those facts. If you noticed this inconsistency you are correct and you probably had an excellent teacher who helped you with your analytical and argumentative skills. Please recognize however, that the facts are the beginning of history knowledge and skill, not the end. If our students do not even have a beginning understanding of the basic facts then they certainly have not been versed in the analytical skills necessary to understand and interpret them.

What's Being Done?

FORTUNATELY, SOME OF the programs that the president initiated or enhanced, especially National History Day and the Our Documents program, address the skills aspect of history and go far beyond simply learning the facts.

Educational Reform

UNFORTUNATELY, AND NO disrespect intended, we have not even begun to solve the problem. Attacking lack of history skills through random programs and initiatives will help some, will make a difference to others and will effect some change. They remind me of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's hodge-podge, alphabet-soup programs during the Depression. The WPA and the CCC (the Works Project Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps, respectively, for readers too young to remember them) helped thousands of people, but they did nothing to end the more substantial, nation-wide Depression. To give our current president credit, however, he is at least doing what Roosevelt suggested, "It is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something."

Trying to effect educational change by presidents has been going on for decades. We all remember President George H. W. Bush's Governors summit on education and we probably remember all the new programs that came out of Our Nation at Risk. We also realize today how little they did. Even the touted No Child Left Behind Act does little to address history education (see Appendix 1), and its ability to evoke any substantial reform is highly in doubt.

Educational reform is not something that can be easily taken care of by our presidents due to the nature of our federal system. Reform must come from the states and local governments. The national government can make a difference and perhaps could evoke true reform if it had the political will but I think we will be waiting a long time before we see this.

What then is the answer? Are we doomed to mediocre education and children who don't know their history? Will America someday fall as Rome did, its culture and people slowly becoming less and less interested and proud of itself, concerned only with the material well being of life?

Perhaps. Yet, in writing this book, I hope to help avoid that scenario. For those of you with school age children, I hope you will read this book and come away with an idea of how to help your child.

For those of you who want to see broader changes, who want to see true history education reform, I hope to give you an idea of where the true problem lies and as Jefferson said, in recognizing it, defeat it.

¹³ 107th CONGRESS; 2d Session, October 1, 2002

H. CON. RES. 451 CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

Available online: <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c107:h.c.r.451.eh:>

Chapter Four - Hypocrites

HYPOCRITES, NOT A PARTICULARLY nice word to describe the American public. To be honest, I still don't feel that comfortable talking this way, but the facts are the facts. Consider what we say: history is important. We agree that without history education, students cannot appreciate our country. Historical skills are needed for good citizens. Or as the U.S. Congress said in its October 2002 resolution:

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That the Congress—

- (1) Recognizes the importance of teaching United States history and civics in elementary and secondary schools;
- (2) Expresses concern regarding the lack of basic understanding of United States history among students of all levels in the United States; and
- (3) Strongly supports efforts to promote the value of education in United States history and to ensure that students in the United States graduate from high school with a significant understanding of United States history and civics.¹⁴

State Requirements

NOW CONSIDER WHAT we do. We test students nationally on math and science. Our business leaders give grants for economic education. We set up statewide skills tests for reading and math and science. An example is Florida's Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT) test. Other states have similar tests. I am not suggesting necessarily that we need tests like these for history but as every teacher knows, if the subject is not tested, it is not taught.

In many of the fifty states, in order to graduate high school students need four years of English, three years of science and three years of math. History requirements are treated differently. To begin with, many states require two to three years of social studies. In 2002, while researching many states Department of Education websites, I found these examples of state graduation requirements

Oklahoma

Two Social Studies credits. Includes American History and Oklahoma History

Texas

Social Studies (two and one-half credits) World History Studies, World Geography Studies, U.S. History Studies Since Reconstruction, U.S. Government.

Kentucky

Social Studies three credits to incorporate U.S. History, Economics, Government, World Geography and World Civilization

North Carolina has several options:

Social Studies three credits

Government/Economics (ELPS), US History, World Studies three credits

Government/Economics (ELPS), US History, World Studies

¹⁴ 107th CONGRESS; 2d Session, October 1, 2002

H. CON. RES. 451 CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

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three credits

Government/Economics (ELPS), US History, World Studies (two courses to meet UNC minimum admission requirements - US History and one elective)

two credits

Social Studies I (Government/ US History) Social Studies II (Self-Advocacy/ Problem Solving)

The most alarming information comes from my own state of Florida's new promotion requirements. Reading, writing, math and science levels must be met in order for a student to be promoted to the next grade. However not only are social studies not mentioned, but according to the legislature, social studies do not even need to be considered for promotion purposes.¹⁵

Notice that not only do the requirements for social studies fall short in the number of credits needed to graduate but also that history is only part of social studies. As the years have progressed, the social studies field has grown to include disciplines such as geography, economics, government, psychology, sociology, world studies, world history and American history. This means of course that many students get only one year of American history. In addition, if you look at certain states like Texas, this study of American history is only from Reconstruction to the present. Yes, lovers of the American Constitution and American Revolution, that means that millions of students only learn about the American Revolution and our Constitution in middle school.

American history has been diluted by social studies. Please do not misunderstand me. Of course I recognize the value of these other courses such as economics and government. Unfortunately, in adding all of these academic disciplines to social studies, we have given little if any time for a true study of American history. For example, how many of you had an American History class where the teacher did not get past World War II or Vietnam?

One year to teach all of American history? If you can do it, you will have to sacrifice something. Let me give you an example. I consider myself an excellent teacher. I have won many awards. I am creative in the classroom. My students tell me in letters and notes how much they have learned from me. Yet in all my years teaching, I have never found more than two or three days available to teach the Korean War. (Please don't hate me Korean War Vets. I try, I really do. In fact, I do more than many other teachers, sad to say. We simply have no time!)

The problem is getting even worse with the trend towards testing and the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act. In September of 2003, Michelle Ungurait, the Tennessee Department of Education's state social studies k-12 consultant said:

"...most states are cutting their assessment and subsequent instruction of American and World History. These recent cutbacks can be directly linked to the standardized testing mandates in language arts and mathematics found in No Child Left Behind."¹⁶

I often compare history teachers to politicians trying to pass a budget. No matter what you do, you have to leave something out and what you leave out is just as important as what you have decided to keep. Tough choices have to be made.

The most difficult choice and the most controversial is how to teach it at all. One choice is to try to teach all of American history in a single year by covering it in a survey format with no real depth and discussion. The second choice, which I personally believe to be the better one, is to focus on particular events, issues and people in order to go into more depth while leaving some material for cursory discussions or left out completely. These are the choices history teachers have to make every day.

Finally, consider again that in many cases students only get one year of American history. If a student is absent for one or two days, how much has he missed? Of course he may fail that part of the test on Korea or Vietnam, but that is only one test in a whole year of tests. When we pass a student who knows 60% of the material, a D in most states, how much of American history does he or she not know? Doing the math that would be 60% of 350 years meaning that he or she is missing 140 years of history.

Go back again to what we say. The public really does get vocal about its interest in American history. Every state, every town has its concerned citizens watching over what history their students are learning. How are women portrayed in the classroom? Do African Americans get enough mention? How is the Civil War taught? Is the

¹⁵ Florida Council for the Social Studies Position Paper. *Legislative Issues 2004*, p.1.

¹⁶ Ungurait, Michelle. "The Depreciation of History Instruction." *History Matters*. National Council for History Education Newsletter. Westlake Ohio, September, 2003.

Holocaust taught? Indeed, in the state of Florida it is a law that the Holocaust and African American history *must* be taught.

Does any other discipline have months for its content? February is African American History Month. March is Women's month. There is a Constitution week and a Holocaust remembrance day. It seems that everyone in the country is telling American history teachers what to teach.

That is the paradox of our discipline. So much energy and time is spent on telling history teachers what to teach. And, to give all of these groups the credit they most definitely deserve, they usually give us the materials to teach it. Yet, after all that energy is expended telling us what to teach, it seems that there is no energy left to protest when it has not been learned. Or, to put it more simply, we care what they learn, but not if they learn it.

I understand why this is the case. It is the nature of history. After all, what we teach affects what students think of the people in their country. When we discuss African Americans, we are not just talking about some ancient race in a far away land. We are discussing our own people. The impressions students get in the classroom carry out into society. They affect how young African Americans feel about themselves and about how others feel about African Americans. The same is true for women and Jews and all other ethnic groups in our country. Everyone has a stake in how his or her particular group is presented.

Workplace Skills

THERE ALSO ARE the problems of practicality. There are only so many years in high school. Students still need to learn economics and government and if possible psychology and all the others. Should we cut their science or math so these subjects can be taught? Should we go to year round schools? If you think education is expensive now, try that suggestion on for size.

Last but definitely not least, there is the widely held belief that history might make you a good citizen but it won't get you a job. In history classes more than any other class students say, *Why do I have to learn this? It's not going to help me get a job.*

Unfortunately they are right. At least in that most computer engineers, actors, businessmen, and etcetera don't need to know what the results of the Constitutional Convention were on a daily basis. The skills in history, as we've discussed, are much more subtle and much more valuable. Most lawyers, politicians, doctors, businessmen and others don't realize that the analytical, decision making skills that they use on the job were probably fine tuned in a history class.

Part of the reason for this attitude is that some of the major voices in education reform have been business leaders. They have correctly claimed that their new hires can't do basic math or can't communicate properly. They have spent money lobbying government, donating scholarships and working with schools at an unprecedented rate to push the skills they want American workers to have. This means that while science and math and even English have seen increases in funding, history has not. After all, history's not going to get you a job; it's only going to make you a good citizen.

In a capitalistic society, the power is in business. *Money talks*, as the saying goes. Government is secondary. Business leaders have an agenda. Working families want their son or daughter to get a good job so she or he can succeed in life. The people who care about your children learning history are the history teachers, some government officials, and you and I. In the long run, we simply don't have the power.

This is the hypocrisy. We protest and organize and spend so much time and energy talking about the need for the study of American history. Yet, when it comes down to it, when the budget axe is ready to fall, when the tough choices need to be made, we grit our teeth, close our eyes and cut another decade or two out of the history class.

Chapter Five - But We Hated It In School

IT'S UNIVERSAL. IT'S perhaps the only fact history teachers agree upon. We all know it to be true. You are reading this book because it is true. Students hate history class.

Oh, I realize that this is not always the case. Many of us were fortunate to have that one teacher who told great stories or dressed up in class or did something exciting to spark student interest. Their classes were some of the most memorable and for many of us, that teacher is one of the ones we remember most. Unfortunately, these teachers are much too rare.

It doesn't seem to matter who you are or where you live. Across the country, in every neighborhood, in every socio-economic group, kids hate history class. Of course some ethnic groups, such as African Americans, hate it more than others. The reason is perfectly simple. Many African American students don't want to hear about how their people were enslaved just as many Jewish students don't like learning about the Holocaust.

The worst news of all is that it also doesn't matter if the student comes from a good background where the parents read and they spend time together learning. Consider my own children who hear exciting stories at the dinner table about people in the past, who have their own copies of their family tree books in their rooms and who go to historical places like Colonial Williamsburg during summer vacations. Like all the other kids in America, while they like history at home, they hate it in school.

Just what is the source of this hatred and what can the concerned parent and/or citizen do about it? The answer is easy to describe, easy to understand but difficult to make happen. It is an answer that only a teacher can give. We are, as they say, the ones in the trenches.

Elements of Education

THE ANSWER, THEREFORE, will not be laden with acronyms, philosophies and theories. It will be practical and straightforward. It will be lengthy but not complex. And finally, it will hopefully be presented in a way that may help you, help your young one or even effect change at a local, state or even national level.

To begin with, we need to look at the three elements of education that directly affect a student's ability to learn history: the school, the teacher and the classroom materials. The good news for parents is that your child may still learn to love history if one or two of these elements are working well. It is only when all three are ineffective that your child is doomed to hate history.

Great Schools versus the Mediocre

MANY BOOKS HAVE been written on the problems in America's schools. Many more educators and politicians have given speeches and claimed to have solutions to fix these schools. I am not going to add to that list. Instead I will simply try to describe the kinds of situations your child may experience in school so you will better understand their problems and also understand what role the school plays in history education.

First let's recognize that there are some incredible schools in America. In these institutions from Florida to Maine and from Texas to Alaska, educators, students and parents are making great strides and successes in education. If your child is at one of these schools, he or she is receiving the best education in the world.

It's no secret what these great schools have: teachers, parents and students who want to be in the school combined with a leader who can put it all together. Unfortunately, these schools are the exception not the rule. In general, some public schools are failing because they are public schools. They have students who don't want to be in school, teachers who don't want to teach, mandates from states that may make sense but go un-funded and a significant percentage of parents who are ignorant of the problems, pre-occupied with work or family stresses or even apathetic.

If your child has a great teacher, they can still learn in such a school. If your child has a good teacher, they may get by in that school, however if your child has an average or below average teacher, you are in trouble.

In average public schools, with average principals, average teachers and average problems there are many distractions and problems children need to deal with. The biggest frustration I have as a teacher is that I see too many children treated as numbers as opposed to individuals.

As students get older, again in average public schools, their schools become larger. By the time they are in

high school, there may be anywhere from 1500 to over 2000 people in the school they attend. Most schools of that size have three to five guidance counselors and three assistant principals. This means that no adult really knows your child unless he or she gets into trouble or is a true standout. In addition, teachers in these schools have classes of anywhere from twenty-five to forty-five students in them. They teach five classes per day and so they have anywhere from 125 to 200 students to contend with each year.

If a student is exceptionally bright with a with a supportive home environment that includes parents who keep in touch with the teacher, then often the student will succeed in any school environment. If a student is having extreme difficulty and has been recognized by someone in the school as having special needs, they often get a special plan directed towards their needs and monitored throughout their schooling.

However, as we know, the majority of average students do not get any special plan nor do they have help at home to keep a constant vigil on their education. As we mentioned before, many parents are preoccupied with work, feeding the family or living their own lives. To be fair, many parents take the sometimes correct attitude that these kids will be grown ups soon and need to learn to deal with problems on their own.

Now, throw all these kids into a classroom of say thirty people. On average, there will be one child in fifteen who has no interest in learning without any outside motivation provided by either the teacher or the school. That allows for two to three children per class who are clearly a problem. Add in the other 50% of the students who would like to learn but find it far more entertaining watching the antics of the unruly students. Finally, add a teacher who does not know how to motivate students and put them all in a school where leadership is not what it should be and you have a recipe for disaster.

As I was training to become a teacher, a lesson was quickly brought to my attention. It is a lesson of survival brought on by the reality of today's schools and the inability of our society to deal with the problems in them. As long as the teacher is not sending students out of their classroom everyday, as long as the principal does not need to get involved with the discipline in the classroom, a teacher can shut the door and do whatever he or she wants.

This idea evolved over time as principals and administrators found themselves more and more inundated with responsibilities and problems. It evolved as the power of teacher's unions became so strong that their job security was in danger only at times of budget cuts. It is a sad truth that I loathe to report and of course will probably be denied by some but it is a truth nonetheless.

The result of all of these circumstances is the following. The average child, who neither stands out for his exceptional abilities nor gets special attention for his special needs, is lost in the public school environment. He or she is one of thousands of students, thrown into a classroom where the average teacher is forced to focus his or her time on discipline instead of teaching. Learning becomes secondary. The student quickly concludes that as long as he stays out of trouble, does the busy work assigned to him so that the teacher can write referrals and deal with the other problems, he will slide by with a passing grade or even an A.

Harsh criticism, I know. As a parent as well as a teacher, the public schools frighten me. Not because of what they are, but because of what they can be. Too many Americans are completely unaware of what goes on in a public school classroom unless they see one on a TV show. The real world is not *Boston Public*. I couldn't even stand to watch that show. It gave the impression that every day schools are filled with sex starved students and teachers, criminals and headline breaking news on a regular basis. They blew everything that teachers do way out of proportion and so distort what really happens in a school that parents are unaware of the real dangers I've described.

Fortunately for my own kids, as a teacher myself, I am aware of the potential disasters that can occur for my child. I can stay in touch with my kid's teachers. I can monitor what is happening in their daily life. I can try to keep them on the straight path and I urge all of you to do the same for your children. As I pointed out earlier though, even my kids don't like history in school. Some things are beyond our control and even knowing and understanding the problem will not necessarily guarantee your child will have a good education.

Let's not leave this chapter depressed. Remember that there are many good schools in this country. Remember that if you are vigilante with your child's education, they will probably succeed. Remember that much of what I describe can be avoided if your child has a good or even a great teacher. It is only when all three strikes are against them that they are out.

Chapter Six - Teachers

I DO NOT WANT to write this chapter. I know that no matter how many wonderful things I say about my colleagues, that someone will take my words the wrong way. Someone will take my words and distort them. Someone may use them to insult or even hurt a teacher and that is the furthest thing from my mind.

Teachers are awesome individuals. Please ignore the fact for a moment that I am a teacher. However I, like all of you, am the product of teachers. My own children have had wonderful teachers. I work with and know some incredible teachers.

These people do what they do because they love it. They certainly do not get the monetary compensation. After all, with their education, more than half of them could be making six figures. They don't do it for the summers off. How many of you would be willing to take a 50% pay cut for just two months off? Teachers work nights and weekends, they coach school sports, they sponsor clubs and they spend their own money to buy supplies for their classrooms.

Teachers make a difference in our lives. Many of us, myself included, are in their profession because some teacher turned us on to something when we were young. If you had a teacher that cared about you or about the subject you were learning, it made a difference. Without these dedicated souls, who do a difficult though highly rewarding job, we would be lost.

With all that being said, there are bad teachers. There are bad doctors. There are bad policemen and there certainly are bad politicians. There are average teachers, good teachers, great teachers and improving teachers. There are all kinds of teachers in all kinds of schools.

Teacher Training

SO, LET'S FOCUS on the history teachers. In response to the abysmal history test results conducted in the year 2002, Professor Diane Ravitch, an education adviser to the Bush administration and professor of education at New York University, called the high school senior results "truly abysmal" and called for better trained history teachers.¹⁷

She is not the first professional to call for better trained history teachers. This is a problem that has been growing for decades and the results are alarming. In 1998, an independent study found that more than half of all secondary history teachers were without a major or a minor in history itself.¹⁸

The reasons for this are varied but let me focus on the two main reasons. To begin with, many education programs throughout the country are laden with education methodology and philosophy courses in how to teach. An inordinate amount of time is spent to train a teacher for the demands of the classroom while a much smaller amount of time is required in their chosen field of teaching. This is not to say that methodology is meaningless. On the contrary, some of the most valuable courses I ever took for my Master's Degree in Education were methodology courses.

This problem was addressed head on in a manifesto issued by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation entitled, *The Teachers We Need and How to Get More of Them*. Signed by prominent leaders such as former Secretaries of Education, school superintendents, governors and state history and education organizations, this manifesto directly criticizes the way teachers are prepared. It states that too many restraints are put on teachers by state certification requirements, that education colleges are too heavy on pedagogy, that teachers do not have a mastery of their content and that, "The nation has too many weak education schools, with teachers, students and curriculums that are not up to the task at hand."¹⁹ In essence, many history teachers do not know their history.

Out of Field Teaching

¹⁷ Pleming, Sue. *US History Stumps Many High School Seniors*. Thu May 9, 2:03 PM ET.

¹⁸ Ingersoll, Richard M. *Why So Many Underqualified High School Teachers*. Education Week on the Web, November 4, 1998. <http://educationweek.org/ew/vol-18/10inger.h18>.

¹⁹ *The Teachers We Need and How to Get More of Them*. Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. March 2003. Available on-line <http://www.edexcellence.net/library/teacher.html>.

THE SECOND REASON for history teachers being unprepared exists due to the practicalities of the education field and something called out of field teaching. Teachers who are good teachers, or valuable coaches or administrators teach a class that is not in their field of knowledge. This can happen for many reasons. If a school has three classes that are not covered and cannot afford to hire a half-day teacher, it can get other teachers to teach that class for one year. If a teacher becomes ill or leaves a position suddenly and a replacement is not readily available, an out of field teacher can be brought in. These situations are almost impossible to avoid and because of this and the impending teacher shortage crises, states have allowed for a growth in out of field teaching.

The problem is getting even worse as the teacher shortage crisis expands. In an attempt to attract more people to the education field and even draw on people from the business community, states are lowering their standards for teachers. In my own state of Florida, they have begun programs to recruit people from community colleges to serve as teachers. When you remember that students study only one year of American history and therefore have only one teacher, the possibilities for damage become enormous.

In addition, social studies encompass a broad range of subjects. A student in college can major in a number of different academic areas and still be in the social studies field. For example, at Brandeis University where I received my major in history, the following departments covered a history major: world history, American history, Ancient and Near East studies, American studies, political science and more. Any one of these majors in combination with teacher education courses would be enough to help me pass the area subject test to get me my certification. In addition, psychology, sociology, anthropology and economics are also social studies fields that add to the diversity of specific social studies degrees that teachers can apply to.

Once you have a social studies certification or even a certification in something such as economics, you become part of the social studies department in a public school. Technically, you can only teach what you are certified for but this rule is frequently broken. The reason is simple. No school ever has the exact number of courses to match every teacher's certification.

Imagine this common scenario: Mr. Smith is an expert on American history. He has been chosen to teach all the honors and Advanced Placement American History courses. The problem is that there are only enough kids to make three classes. Teachers in Mr. Smith's school all teach five classes per day. There is a need for someone to teach two classes of economics. Mr. Smith is now teaching economics even though he has never had an economics class in his life. This can happen in science as well where a teacher's specialty is physics but they end up teaching a biology course as well to fill up the schedule.

Why do schools resort to this? Why do they assign teachers to teach students when they know that a teacher is not qualified? Would the business world accept this kind of a situation? Would you be comfortable with a podiatrist performing heart surgery because they both were doctors they just had different certifications?

We talk and talk about the importance of education yet we accept situations where foreign language teachers are teaching history classes, where unprepared individuals are responsible for guiding our children into adult hood, and we set up more and more regulations without understanding the problem or providing the proper resources to do the job.

Teachers as Coaches

PERHAPS THE BEST example of our country's hypocrisy and skewed priorities is a situation you are probably familiar with. I am talking of the situation where history students find that their teacher is also the basketball or football coach. Now don't misinterpret me. There are some incredible teachers who are also coaches. The point is what this situation tells us about the way schools are run and how it affects the history student.

Since schools are often short on funds, the best way to maximize their revenue is to have their employees perform more than one task. The problem with that is that there is not enough money to pay for both a good coach and a good teacher. If a teacher coaches, he or she usually gets some kind of stipend such as \$500 to \$2500 depending on the school system and the sport. When you factor in the hours spent after school at practices, the hours spent on the weekend at games, the time to plan, the time to prepare, that boils down to less money than minimum wage.

Why then would a teacher agree to such an unheard of salary? There are two reasons: he loves the sport and wants to be involved or he has been forced to coach in order to get the teaching job. This turns into a lose-lose situation for the student and the athlete. Certainly some students have had great coaches. Certainly some students have had great teachers. No insult intended to any of the many coaches who do both, but we don't always find a teacher who is a great coach and a great teacher. Again, please don't take my words out of context or read more into them than they mean. The people who are doing both jobs have not only dedicated their life to a student's education,

they have also sacrificed their adult social life to be there for the kids.

My point here is not to insult either the coaches or the teachers. It is to bring up a basic economic point. In trying to save money, schools have sacrificed one or the other skill. Of course there are many people who can do both well. That is not the point. The point is that there are many more who cannot do both well. Even worse, usually the first skill to be sacrificed is the education part. For example, I am sure everyone would agree that if a well-known professional athlete in your local town were to retire from his sport and dedicate his life to helping kids, that any school would jump at the chance to let him coach. Would they turn him down because he has no education degree and has never had any training in a classroom? Probably not. They would get a waiver or help him get certification, but they would not turn him away.

On the other hand, would the reverse also be true? Would a great teacher, with lots of awards or experience be offered a position if he did not coach? The answer unfortunately is not nearly as often. Here is the reason. When a coach of a high school team retires, that position obviously needs to be filled. Schools do not have the money or resources to hire an independent coach. They look at their current staff first of course, but most of them are already busy with other coaching positions. They need to look somewhere else to find a coach. So, when the coach first retired, he also retired from whatever his teaching job was. The school will therefore do its best to find a teacher for the position who can also coach.

When this first happened to me, I was not aware of this phenomenon. I thought I had an excellent education and great credentials and would therefore not have any trouble finding a teaching job. Then, when offers did not materialize, I could not understand why I was being constantly overlooked. I began to feel inadequate and to doubt my abilities. Once I found a job, I quickly saw the policy in action. I learned the politics of the school system as I saw administrators struggling to fill positions. The principal's eyes would dart back and forth, they would sweat when asked, "Found a coach for the basketball team yet?" and their entire day would be focused on athletics.

The principals and administrators know that they will take a lot more heat for not having a good coach than they will for not having a good 10th grade world history teacher. I really don't need to explain this but could you ever imagine a principal standing in line at the local supermarket and a customer recognizing her and instead of asking about the football or basket ball team they lean over and say, *so how are those tenth grade history students doing?*

It's the nature of our country, sports over education. Fortunately for you, I will not continue with any soapbox or analysis as to why this is the case and what should be done about it. Instead, I will answer the more basic question: Why does this affect history class so much?

Social studies majors are popular majors among college athletes simply because there are so many of them available. To be sure, there are thousands of athletes who major in everything from biochemistry to computer science to discrete math. However, no other academic discipline in the k-12 field has as many options as social studies. An athlete majoring in psychology, sociology, politics, law, history, anthropology and many others, can eventually teach social studies and therefore history. Add to this, the teaching out of field problems discussed above and you can see why so many history teachers have no knowledge of history.

Finally consider that many people consider history an easy subject to teach. Your child is more apt to have a history teacher who is also a great coach, though the teacher may not be the best person to teach history. When that coach retires, he will need a replacement. No doubt the principal will again look for a coach who can also teach history and the viscous cycle will continue.

Is your child doomed then if he gets the football coach or the Algebra II teacher as his American history teacher? Not necessarily. As I said earlier, it takes three strikes to be out. Some coaches I know are also very good teachers. Some teachers teaching out of field are very good teachers. Even if the teacher is not very good and the school is not very good, your child still has a chance. The problem for these very good and not so good teachers occurs when they enter the classroom and open the book for the first time. But that is the topic for our next chapter.

Chapter Seven - The Textbook

IT'S TIME NOW for the answer. It's time to see what is the most powerful obstacle to your child's love of history. It is a weapon powered by hundreds of millions of dollars, political lobbyists, major corporations and decades of precedent. It's a weapon whose main goal is not the education of students, but the making of money. I am talking of course of the textbook.

In an article in Education News.org in 2002, Dr. Frank Wang of MIT reported that:

"Studies on the role of textbooks show that up to 90% of classroom time is structured around them and that the weaker the teacher, the greater the reliance upon them."

And that "Further studies indicate that students spend between 70-90% of their homework using textbooks."²⁰

Textbooks permeate history classrooms. They are used as reading books, they are used as reference books and they are the main and usually only source of homework. Regardless of the teacher, regardless of their skill, regardless of their knowledge, almost all of them use textbooks in the classroom.

Yet, have you ever known a student who loved picking up a history textbook? Have you ever seen a student place this usually heaviest of all books into their backpacks just because they wanted to read it? How many of you can hear the groans inside the class as the teacher says, "O.K. class, please take out your history textbooks." Today, when you go through the bookstore, do your eyes wander through the history section in search of a text? Of course not. Textbooks are for reference. They are for the shelf in your study. They are where you go when you want to learn an interesting fact. They are not for the casual reader and they certainly don't tell entertaining stories.

So why are textbooks so boring? Why don't we want to read them and why does everyone use them? To begin with, let's talk about the nature and origins of history. *His-story*, the word seems to make sense. Thousands of years ago, men like Homer would entertain the king, the queen or whatever important people were listening by telling them glorious stories about the past. The stories held people's interest for hours. In some cultures like the Irish, the stories lasted for days or even weeks and storytellers were the most important people in the community.

Also many thousands of years ago, professional historians practiced their craft. Egyptian scholars recorded Ramses' victories with hieroglyphics on his tombs and monuments and Greeks like Thucydides recorded the Peloponnesian war. As time progressed, historians became more scholarly and professional. Churchmen and university scholars began to collect and store data on the events of the past. Archives and libraries stored all kinds of sources from documents and speeches to diaries and newspaper articles.

This is the source of the problem with history. It is both an art and a science. The art is extremely entertaining. It is the oldest and most popular form of art ever used, storytelling. The science is the science of record keeping and analysis. It is investigation and even discovery. It is explaining cause and effect, making connections, determining both short and long term trends. Both of these tools are essential to history education, yet in almost all history classes across the country, only one form is being used.

The textbook is the science and the art has been lost. Today's textbooks teach statistics. How many people died in the Battle of Antietam? How many planes did the Japanese have at Pearl Harbor? Which president signed the Emancipation Proclamation?

Even the causes and effects are taught as facts to be learned. For example, *the reason for the Civil War was a mixture of both conflicting ideas over slavery as well as a fear of the power of the Federal Government. Or, the United States was surprised at Pearl Harbor because its people had lulled themselves into a false sense of security in believing that its twin ocean border would protect them.*

As my favorite education philosopher, John Dewey, once said, "An idea taught is merely another fact."²¹

Textbooks try to teach history as if it were a science. Not that I find science boring for at least they have lab work and exploration. Science answers the student's curiosity. It explains why the world is the way it is. History, on the other hand, as presented in textbook form does not truly answer why. It only tells what. In listing facts for students to memorize we find history teachers teaching statistics; boring, mindless, meaningless statistics. The facts they learn, devoid of all emotion, are presented as indisputable evidence, thus contributing no understanding and having no real value beyond interesting trivia.

Texts also make history seem to be cut and dried. There is no mystery, no wonder of how things will turn out,

²⁰ Wang, Dr. Frank. Education News.org, 2002.

²¹ Dewey, John Experience and Education. Touchstone Press. New York, NY. 1997

and no emotion. Students who study history through a textbook learn to accept the past as a given. They learn that this is the way it was and that life simply happened that way.

This is because in a history text, the role of the individual, the fragility of the present and the power of one person to make a difference, is lost. The complexity of the times is lost when it is taught as a done deal. The Civil War, the American Revolution, the Cuban Missile Crisis all seem to be inevitable events that had to turn out the way they did. By presenting history this way, students get the impression that history is almost an independent entity that has flowed forward in one direction for thousands of years with nothing to stop it or change its direction. The wonder, fear, anxiety and curiosity that people in the past experienced as their lives unfolded is lost on our students. Instead, we engender submissiveness in students who accept history and in turn, life as it happens to them because that is the way it has always been.

This idea also helps to explain why so many adults are exasperated with students who are uninterested in current events. Students see themselves as separate from, or at least unable to affect, the world around them. Perhaps this is why voter turnout for younger people is so low. We call them apathetic, uninterested and sometimes even unpatriotic. What is even more tragic about this is that students have been the major force in revolutionary changes throughout history. For example, in Europe in 1848, in the anti-communist protests in Eastern Europe, and during Vietnam it was students who refused to accept the way the world was and worked to change it.

Worse still is that once the students have read just a little of a textbook, they learn they do not need to read it at all. Instead, they use what I call *the seek and find method*. They look at the end of the chapter that has been assigned, they notice what words are in the text that match the question and copy the words from the book to do their assignment. Textbook companies have even made this easier by putting key words in bold print. There is no reading whatsoever. This is why student homework all looks the same. They did not copy each other, they all copied the textbook. I learned this within my first several weeks as a teacher when I found over fifty students with the same answers and no possible way to have copied each other's work.

For those students who do not want to cheat and actually want to read and learn from the textbook, the news is just as bad. Dr. Willard Daggett, a national known education consultant and head of the International Center for Leadership Education, has been studying textbooks, newspapers and other reading materials to discover their readability level. What he found was that almost all textbooks are universally unreadable for high school students in grammar, vocabulary and context. In other words, students who try to read a text eventually become so frustrated from not understanding them that they put them down and never pick them up.²²

Textbooks re-enforce the worksheet mentality since these are often supplied as supplementary material to textbooks. Tests are also supplied by the textbook company making it very tempting for teachers to use those instead of their own tests. This forces teachers to focus on the information in the textbook, not what they themselves present in the class. Indeed, how do teachers compete with free tests, free worksheets, CD ROMs and other handouts?

Both sides of the issue should be recognized. Many people involved with writing and publishing and selling textbooks are interested in the education of American children. Some of them truly work hard to provide an education for students that they believe is the best available. After all, they are simply providing a service to the public that they believe the public wants. And, to be fair, as we'll talk about later when we discuss how textbooks are written and why, textbooks are one of the few ways for the public to control what their children learn about their country.

Textbook Costs

TEXTBOOKS ARE EXPENSIVE. In my experience, textbooks on average cost about \$50 per student. Obviously there is a large variety of textbooks out there for many different subjects but this number is accurate enough and perhaps on the low side. Every student needs a textbook. Schools don't buy new textbooks every year although they do replace lost and damaged ones. Instead they go through a formal adoption procedure every three to five years depending on the state and the course. Let's make this real simple by taking an average of every four years, a new textbook is adopted. It's also safe to assume that a school has to only buy one book per subject for a student's entire career in high school. Sound reasonable?

Now let's take a look at how many high school students there are in the United States. According to the 2001 World Almanac, there were over thirteen million high school students enrolled in the school year 1997-1998. Multiplying that number by the average of \$50 per book, we find that schools around the country spend over half a billion dollars a year on textbooks alone per subject and only for high school.

²² Daggett, Dr. Willard. Presentation to Florida Teachers of the Year. Orlando, Fl. July 2004.

In addition, after looking over the history textbooks that schools across the country use, we find that more than 75% of the textbook market is controlled by only six companies.²³ Regardless of any minor errors in math, changes in student populations or changes in curriculum, it's easy to see that the textbook market is an awesome power to behold.

The Textbook Selection Process

NOW MONEY AND power are not in itself a problem. It can even do a lot of good. An example of this would be all the free materials the textbook companies provide. However if you want to truly understand the problem with history education and why the textbook is so central to it, you need to know how textbook companies get their products purchased and how they think.

The process for all textbooks, history and others, is called adoption. Many states have different ways of adopting textbooks but here is the basic idea. A state committee made of educators, experts in the field, concerned and/or powerful individuals and sometimes political appointees sit on a board and examine the textbooks that companies have submitted to them. The states then choose which book or books will be available for every county in the state to purchase. Get the committee to adopt your book and you have just made hundreds of millions of dollars.

To illustrate what is at stake here, look at what Richard Feynman, a Nobel Prize winning physicist, who was asked to adopt a textbook for California) said regarding the textbook selection process:

“During the weeks that I was reading texts, I kept getting calls from the publishers. They wanted to take me out to dinner, lunch, wherever I wanted.”²⁴

The stakes at these adoption meetings are high. One person can make a difference in a contract worth hundreds of millions of dollars. This is true not just at the time of the current adoption but also far into the future. School systems are like everyone else. They don't like change. Keeping things the same is much easier so once a book has been adopted many teachers want to keep the same book. They have already made up their lesson plans, they have already adjusted their tests and their schedules and they have already read that book. A new textbook means so much more work for so many more people that once you're in, it's much easier to stay.

How then do you get in? How do you convince a group of five to twenty-five people that your book is the one that every student in the state should use? I really want to spend some time on this answer because it will explain not only how textbook companies get their books sold but also why the books are so boring.

As we saw earlier in the book, many different groups have an interest in how history is presented to our youth. Jewish groups want the Holocaust taught, women's groups want a prominent role for women seen, African Americans want mention of not only Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. but also of Sojourner Truth, Marcus Garvey and others important to their history and culture. Many of these people as well as thousands more have some power and influence.

In addition, every citizen has an opinion of how history should be told. For example, let's say that one of the people sitting on a textbook adoption committee is Irish. He looks through the book and wonders if they have talked about the Irish potato famine and how they portray the Molly McGuire.

Obviously, textbook companies do not research every person who is on a textbook adoption committee and rewrite their books to make each person happy. However, they are aware that every state has the potential to have someone on their board with an interest in how their particular group is portrayed. In addition, even if the book is adopted, if some concerned citizen or organization finds a part of their book offensive then they may petition the school or the state to get rid of that book.

The problem is not unique to the subject of history. Science has to deal with it often. Consider the Scopes Monkey Trial and the whole controversy with teaching Darwinism. Overall however, math textbooks and science textbooks rarely have to worry about offending people. History textbooks do. As discussed earlier, what a student learns about history affects what they think of themselves, other citizens and their place in the country. It affects voter behavior which in turn affects politics.

Realizing this, textbook publishers produce books that they hope will offend no one. If you doubt this,

²³ The American Textbook Council <http://www.historytextbooks.org/adoptions.htm> Copyright © 2005

²⁴ Greene, Michael. *Richard Feynman and The Textbook Selection Process* Excepted from the autobiography of Richard Feynman <http://www.redshift.com/~jmichael/html/feynman.html>

someday do a study on the way history textbooks have changed. Grab a book from the 1950s. It's all about politics and what white men did in the history of America. Then as each group gained political power, they earned a place in the textbook. Indeed perhaps the best example of African Americans finally gaining freedom and respect is how they are portrayed in the textbooks today.

Unfortunately, this has created a book that is puzzling to students. In an attempt to be everything to everybody, textbooks shoot from one topic to the next without the normal transition or connection that the story of history brings. Or, as Harriet Tyson Bernstein author of *A Conspiracy of Good Intentions: America's Textbook Fiasco* says in her description of what a textbook is like today: Textbooks.

“Call forth the image of eight people at a restaurant who order eight different kinds of soup. The waiter mixes all the soup together and gives each customer a bowlful. The amalgamated soup may be nutritious but it is theme less and confusing. Nobody willingly would eat such a concoction.”²⁵

This need to not offend and the tendency textbooks have to be theme-less and confusing has resulted in them all looking the same. When I sat on a textbook adoption committee and later consulted with administrators on what textbooks were better, it amazed me at how similar all the books were. Discussions between educators revolved around which book had the better maps, table of contents and questions. There was very little difference between any of the books. I have found one exception so far. It is a book that is taking the country by storm. Joy Hakim's *A History of Us*. Unfortunately, there is no high school equivalent.

The problem has gone so far as to actually infringe upon state's rights. It's true. I'm not just throwing out bait to the state's rights people in the hopes to rally someone. Remember that there are no real local textbook companies. The business is too profitable for anyone to settle for simply making a book sold only in one state. The major U.S. history textbooks are sold throughout the country. Textbook companies realize that if they want to stay in business and compete with the guy down the road, they must sell to as many states as possible.

What's the biggest state in the country in population size? California. Next biggest? Texas. If a company sells to either or both of those states, it has just made it big. If Delaware, Rhode Island, New Mexico and others buy the same textbooks then that is all well and good, but the real money to be made is by selling to the states with the largest population numbers.

How do you sell to the big states? You must know what the people in that state want for their students. You must get to know their needs, their desires, and their population. In short, you must market your textbooks for the big states. The little states are then given textbooks to examine that have been written to appeal to the big states. The conclusion therefore is obvious, textbooks are controlled to some degree by what states like California and Texas want for their kids. Regional and local history is left to textbooks in the early grades or supplementary materials provided by individual teachers or small publishers.

Censorship in Textbooks

FINALLY, LET'S AGAIN go back to Professor Diane Ravitch, an educational advisor for President George W. Bush. She has sat on many historical and educational committees organized by academic groups such as the National Council for History Education as well as governmental committees established by the U.S. Congress. Professor Ravitch was involved with test makers and textbook publishers and has just released a new book, *The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn*, Vintage Publishers, 2004. In this book, Professor Ravitch discusses among other things how bias and sensitivity reviewers for textbook companies remove material from textbooks that can be considered offensive, politically incorrect or objectionable. This in itself is alarming enough. Professor Ravitch goes on to describe how some of these criteria are decided. For example, passages that described a woman doing quilting were removed because they show women in a stereotypical role despite the fact that this was an important part of life on the western frontier. Another example is how a story by William Bennett was rejected out of hand because of his controversial views even though the story in no way reflected these views.

Ravitch concludes by saying that:

“The Bias and Sensitivity reviewers work with assumptions that have the effect of stripping away everything that is potentially thought provoking and colorful from texts that children encounter...Parents and teachers and the public need to be aware of these assumptions and the reasoning process behind

²⁵ Bernstein , Harriet Tyson. *A Conspiracy of Good Intentions: America's Textbook Fiasco*

them, because they are reducing the curriculum in the schools to bland pabulum.”²⁶

It’s obvious why kids don’t like reading textbooks. The texts are bland, boring, and uninspiring. All of the data I have given you just help proves what you already felt in your gut. We professional historians and teachers have been trying change the status quo for years but this is a great power we are fighting. Indeed as far back as March 1996, over 140 National Council for History Education members gathered at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, to develop strategies for improving history education. Prompted by the dismal results of the November 1995 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) U.S. History test, the symposium brought together academic and public historians, classroom teachers from all grade levels, school administrators and curriculum specialists, authors and publishers, and museum and historical society personnel.

Among many other recommendations, these professionals recommended that:

“Classroom practices should go beyond the textbook to include multiple materials and venues...”

And:

“Textbooks should be only one part of a variety of sources for historical study.”²⁷

The Council went on to hold workshops with school systems around the country, publish its results, meet with politicians and continue to add members to its ranks. They continue to spread the message of the danger of the textbook and the need to rethink how we teach history.

Although the National Council for History Education as well as other such groups have been extremely vocal, the textbook still permeates history classrooms. Some improvements have been made especially in states like Ohio where the council is extremely active. Overall however, it seems the textbook market is more powerful than they were ten years ago. Your children continue to receive them in every history class. In the county in which I teach, school board policy dictates that every student must have a textbook which they can take home . This has eaten up much of the funds for our department and prevented us from buying almost any substantial resources outside of the textbook. The result is that teachers who don’t know any better are unable to locate any free resources or outside funds to supplement the textbooks. The teachers who don’t care still use the textbook exclusively, still have students fill out worksheets and answers questions from the book in order to learn history, and still re-enforce that history is indeed the most boring of subjects.

²⁶ Ravitch, Diane. *Forbidden Topics, Forbidden Words. Excerpt from her book The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn.* Reprinted by permission in the National Council For History Education Newsletter *History Matters*. April 2003.

²⁷ *Reinvigorating History in U.S. Schools: Reform Recommendations for the States. A Meeting of the Minds.* National Council for History Education, 1996. <http://www.history.org/nche/>.

Chapter Eight - Combining Art and Science

EVERYONE LOVES A GOOD story. As we discussed in the last chapter, that's what history is. That is where the love of history begins and that is where we need to start. In the classes that I teach I read to my students at the beginning of every period. They often rush to class in order to get inside before the bell rings and the story begins.

Yet, many history teachers don't tell stories. They jump right to the end skipping all the intrigue and wonder and giving away the ending before you have any chance to truly become interested. The majority of the class time is then spent on analyzing the story, in the better classes, and in memorizing the facts of the story, in the weaker classes. The way history plays out becomes a static foregone conclusion.

Storytelling

OBVIOUSLY I AM not suggesting that all teachers need to do is tell stories every day. There is no time for that. In addition, the skills we discussed earlier as being essential to develop in history class can only come from the analysis of the story once it is over.

But is there a happy medium? Is there a way to combine the art of history to get the children interested and the knowledge that will allow for the teaching of the skills? As suggested the use of storytelling in the classroom is a wonderful tool that engages students and allows for an understanding at the individual level that is essential for understanding the past. Unfortunately, stories are not always an option because many stories are not written in a way to engage young readers since most of them are about adults and quite often history stories are not available for the specific time period the teacher needs to present. There is however, one additional option, historical fiction.

The Value of Historical Fiction

HISTORICAL FICTION IS a teaching tool some history teachers automatically dismiss. Its very name, they say, implies its uselessness. After all, if it is fiction, it is not historical.

I respectfully disagree. Teaching history is teaching the ideas, the feelings, and the emotions behind the actions of people in the past. Ultimately, a history teacher's primary job is explaining *why* not just *what*.

The advantage of historical fiction and of course real life stories is that the entire story is presented to the reader. As we all know, people in the past are just like people today. They had hopes and dreams, everyday concerns, trivial problems, and all the other parts of life that human beings have to deal with. They did not, just like us, live every moment for the historical event.

This is not an insignificant point. In order to understand the people of the past, we must see them as people. We must recognize that they did not simply plan all these events or spend their entire lives focused on some political or historical concern. History happened to them in the same way it happens to us. Stories not only teach us about the past, they teach us about ourselves.

The other main advantage to stories is obvious: they are exciting because they are a dramatic representation. Whether you read to your students or use movies, the stories motivate the young learner to want to know more. The teacher can use the story to connect the student to the facts and explanations of the time period. Finally, they even allow for livelier debates and discussions because the student can also key into the emotions of the period as well. Think how much better a debate on the right of the South to secede would be when the students feel the sympathy or anger portrayed by a Southerner losing his property and rights, or an abolitionist abhorred by the slavery in his own country. The debate rises far above the intellectual exercise and more closely resembles the arguments of the time period itself.

However, the most valuable part of stories is in their ability to make the characters real by the way they focus on the everyday. To illustrate this let me give you an idea of what's involved in writing good historical fiction by describing to you the research that I have done in writing my *Young Heroes of History Series*.

A writer can't just say, "George ate the apple." He needs to say, "George took a bite of his favorite, juicy Albemarle apple that his mother picked for him." Research becomes key in this instance not to mention fun. When I was writing a scene like this one, I needed to find out what kind of an apple a boy living in Richmond, Virginia would commonly eat during the Civil War era. I called the local library however the reference librarian had no idea where to begin searching. I called a local supermarket and asked the produce department if they knew what kind of

an apple would be eaten in 19th century Virginia. Their response was a sudden click, followed by a dial tone. After two weeks of fruitless searching I got in touch with a historian at the United States Department of Agriculture who was able to answer my question.

Mundane facts are essential to good stories. I remind you again that we are using this material to allow our students to get into the character's mind and to really feel that they are part of history. Human beings focus on the trivialities of life, such as what our favorite sports team is, what time we get up in the morning, who will we talk to at lunch today, and etc. If the characters in the book are more human then the students can relate to them and see them as living people similar to them and not some *dead guy in the history books*. This is perhaps the most important lesson stories can teach us.

When looking exclusively at historical fiction it is imperative to realize that these stories are fiction only in their main characters. The motivations, ideas, events and significant people that move the story are the same facts that we teach in our textbooks and lectures. Indeed, a good researcher can find anything they need. For example, my first book, *Send 'Em South*, is based on the story of an escaped slave, Anthony Burns, who hid out in Boston until the Fugitive Slave Law forced the authorities to return him amidst much hoopla and protests. In order to make the story more approachable for kids, I changed the main character to a young girl and created a few other characters to support the story. Other parts of my stories are taken directly from soldier's diaries or official records that today can be found all over the Internet and through interlibrary loans.

What better way then to teach the facts than in a way that entertains as well as teaches? Lesson plans for stories can easily be found on the Internet, see the attached appendices for help or go to the website for this book, www.ilovehistoryonline.com. Questions for review, tests, supplementary projects and follow up work are quite often included either by a publisher, the author or by other teachers who have posted these materials on web sites.

As history teachers, we have a duty to provide understanding, not just knowledge. After all, facts and dates can always be looked up in a book or a computer but they do not convey historical truth. If you can give your students a clear understanding and empathy for the people of the past then they will be able to analyze human actions and explain why events happened. Once you have given them that, they will not only be able to analyze the past, but they will be able to comprehend their present and prepare for the future.

Concerns with using Historical Fiction

THE PROBLEMS WITH historical fiction and storytelling in general unfortunately are many. Where does a teacher separate fact from fiction? When does a teacher find the time to assign the book? How does a teacher find time to teach the facts that go along with the history? Most importantly, where does a teacher get the story? Most of the time and money is spent on purchasing textbooks.

Finding a story to use and designing the lessons, writing the tests and locating the resources to purchase books are all tasks that teachers must do all on their own. With all the problems we have discussed in finding qualified teachers, with all the other duties and aggravations that teachers have to deal with, is it any wonder that 70% of class time is spent with the textbook?²⁸

For Educators

THE REMAINDER OF this chapter is for teachers who are looking for ways to find and use historical fiction. If this doesn't interest you, feel free to move on.

The next question is the most practical one of all, how do you find the time to use historical fiction? This is not easy to answer since so many of us struggle just to reach the present day by the end of our course. Finding the time to watch an entire movie or read a book is rare indeed. How then does a teacher who recognizes the value of historical fiction find the time?

The first thing to realize with historical fiction is that it is not necessary to spend time discussing the characters and other fictitious parts of the story unless you are using an excerpt. Even then, you need only give the student enough information to understand the scene you are using. While character discussions may make interesting classes, they must be avoided unless you are one of those lucky educators with extra time on your hands. You will get enough discussion of the characters when you discuss the historical issues. When discussing why Paul signed up

²⁸ Dr. Frank Wang on Textbooks
<http://www.wangeducation.com/editorials.shtml>
2006

for the German Army, you will inevitably cover his personal reasons as well as the historical ones.

The second thing to realize when using historical fiction is that it is not necessary to re-teach the information. Good historical fiction must teach the information in order to be readable and realistic. When showing *All Quiet On The Western Front*, you don't need to lecture on the tactics of the war, life in the trenches or reasons for joining up. A review of the story, along with some added teacher guidance will cover the material sufficiently, hold the students' interest longer and perhaps cover it better than you could yourself. In addition, if you prepare well written post questions for the students, you can cover any of the historical facts you feel you need to focus on.

Books present a harder problem than movies. Because of their greater character development and detail, using excerpts is difficult and reproducing for classroom use is expensive and illegal. However there are ways teachers can get around breaking the law when reproducing for one time classroom use. A good school librarian can point you to the right reference book. Reading to your class is an option and one that shouldn't be dismissed even at the secondary level. I have found that even at that level, students love to sit back and listen to a teacher read a story to them. You can also have them read aloud to each other. Unfortunately, these options are not optimal. What you really want is to be able to purchase the books to be read.

I am not an expert on raising money, although I have done my share. With today's limited budgets, you need to explore all your avenues from requiring parents purchase books, to writing grants, to looking to businesses for donations, and etc. Last but not least is to consider assigned summer reading.

When you do have the funds to purchase books consider several options. Check with an English teacher or another humanities person would be interested in co-teaching it. Look for more than one book on a subject or subjects to allow for more sharing of information between students and more freedom of choice as well.

For example, I have written a series of civil war novels that stand on their own but also tie in similar to a John Jakes idea where the characters in all the books are mainly from one family. I suggest to my teachers who want to use more than one book to purchase approximately five copies of each book in the series, have different students read each book, then prepare an oral report/piece together activity which allows students to see how the events of the war evolved and related to each other.

When choosing the kind of a book the most important factor to consider is that the book be written from a young person's perspective. While not mandatory, it is much more effective to provide students with a role model they can relate to. Remember that the main purpose of historical fiction is to allow the student to perceive history on an individual level.

Try to find a topic that is well researched. Some books include a bibliography. If there is no bibliography and you are not sure of the author's credentials, look for reviews by historical societies, national parks and museums. Be careful of literary reviews because while they will give you an idea of the book's readability, they will not necessarily be helpful in evaluating the book's historical authenticity and accuracy.

Remember that you are trying to balance entertainment, understanding and interest with historical analysis and interpretation. Don't fall into the trap of using a good story just because it will entertain or because the English teacher has a class set. That doesn't mean you should avoid interdisciplinary units. Simply remember your priorities. If the English teacher is reading a good story that fits your curriculum, integrate your teaching with the English class and you will still be meeting your goals without losing class time reading a story that does not have enough historical relevance.

Chapter Nine - So, What Is The Answer?

ARE YOU A REALIST? As you read this book, do you realize all the obstacles that need to be overcome and can you confine yourself to doing what you know you can accomplish?

Or, are you a dreamer? Do you read this book and get disgusted with what is going on? Do you burn with a sense of injustice and yearn to do whatever you can, practical or not, in order to help our children and our country?

If you are anything like me, you are probably both. Part of me wants to tell you of my dreams, my hopes and how I envision a country where every child loves to study history, learns great lessons from the past and uses those lessons to aid him or her and the great democracy we have created. Another part of me realizes the pipe dream and fantasy a world like that is and focuses on whatever can be done within the framework of today's reality.

Practical Solutions

MY GOAL IN writing this book is to provide you with both answers, practical and fanciful and see where it takes us. Let's begin with the practical. As I have mentioned before, there are many organizations fighting to improve history education, from the National Council for the Social Studies to the Organization of American Historians to the National Park Service and beyond.

There are political groups and politicians dedicated to education reform and there are foundations such as the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, which publishes a newsletter every week called *The Education Gadfly*.

One of the most vocal groups specifically involved with history education reform is the National Council for History Education. The organization, centered in Ohio, has come up with many recommendations covering some of the problems I have stated in this book. They recommend more history education for history teachers, more support from administration, less focus on the textbook, more tools available to teachers, as well as many other suggestions. They cover much of what is practical and possible today. For more information be sure to check out their web site <http://www.history.org/nche/>.

The council's suggestions are excellent and well researched but unfortunately they rely for the most part on local and state leaders to implement them. In addition, the council's political lobbying power is limited and for the most part change is not happening nearly fast enough or in a grand enough scale to effect most American history students. Other similar lobbying groups are likewise powerless, except of course for the textbook lobby.

The practical fixes are limited by the lack of political will in our society and in our government, an issue I will address later. Meanwhile, if the most practical methods available are unlikely to change anything anytime soon, what is left for the concerned parent or classroom teacher?

The answer is not much. I know that sounds depressing but if you have understood all the problems I have illustrated in this book then you can see why there is not much hope.

Things a Parent Can Do

YOU WILL NOTICE of course that I said *not much*. There are some things you can do. The most important of which is simply being aware. As we discussed in the introduction, many parents are ignorant of the extent of the problem while most feel helpless to do anything about it. In writing this book, my hope is at the very least to empower you with enough information to at least help you deal with the problem on an individual basis if nothing else.

On a practical level you can be more involved with your child's education. You can try to find out who are the better teachers and/or schools and place your child in their care. Indeed some parents, feeling that there is no one they can trust enough, have taken the drastic step of home educating their children.

Now, while I do not necessarily recommend abandoning the ship and pulling your child out of school, let me tell you the same things I tell home educators when they ask me what to do to help their child learn history.

My first recommendation with any student is always to get an idea how best that child learns and go from there. The suggestions I mention therefore may work for some and not for others but hopefully something will work.

The first priority is to get your child or student to see the people of the past as people. Get them excited about the history and interested in the people, not the events. Focus on the stories, and then have them fill in the facts with their own research. Stories, as I've mentioned before are the original form of historical knowledge. They will

entertain and excite children more than any other form of learning you could ever hope for.

Once the excitement is there, the interest will follow. Begin with reading historical fiction like *Johnny Tremain* or the American Girl series or my own Young Heroes of History series, www.youngheroesofhistory.com. Or you can watch reliable Hollywood movies like *Glory and Gettysburg* and the George Washington miniseries. Try to focus on stories about people their own age. Kids relate better to kids and it makes the history more approachable to them instead of simply being stuff from the adult world.

Once you've got their interest, watch documentaries and the History Channel together. Public Broadcasting Stations (PBS) has some great series on videotape or DVD that can be found in libraries or bought. Buying a set and splitting the cost with other families makes this an affordable option.

For teachers and home educators, an idea that works well is role-playing. Have your students keep a diary or a journal or a time line about a made up family and then bring the family all the way forward through time, creating a fictional history.

Most importantly, once your students have a general idea of the major events in history, make sure you perform some kind of family tree activity if at all possible. Those students who can see their own family in the past find it much easier to relate to the past and often have the keenest interest.

Go on field trips to local history sites whenever possible. Let your students see that history happens everywhere and to everyone. Every little town has a rich and fascinating history. Incorporate historic sites into long distance vacations. The more the children can relate to history, whether through the people in your family or the places you explore, the better. Make sure not to do this too much or you will get the exasperated look I have seen on my daughter's face when she says, "Vacation? Does that mean we have to go to another history site?"

Last but not least, look into National History Day. This academic competition allows students to research just about anything in history they want, present it in any format they want and have it judged by community leaders and teachers. Almost all fifty states participate in it and many schools plan activities around it. If your local school doesn't participate, then contact your state coordinator through the web site www.nationalhistoryday.org. I firmly believe that this competition is the best way to learn about history, learn how to research and even to compete. As the coordinator in my local county, I have been involved for over 10 years and every year is better than the last. In the end, I am reminded of the old Life cereal commercials. Kids won't like it if they think it is good for them. You have to almost fool them into learning history, but once you get them hooked, their interest will last forever. Indeed the best thanks I ever received in over ten years of teaching came from a bright young junior in high school when she said to me, "Thank you for making me want to learn history."

Chapter Ten - The Dream

SATISFIED? I HOPE NOT. If you are willing to leave your child's knowledge of history up to chance; if you are willing to take on the job of teaching them history yourself when you probably don't have a degree in history and you are paying tax dollars for someone else to do it; if you are content knowing that over 50% of today's graduating seniors²⁹ and new voters know very little if any relevant history, then you can go ahead and close the book.

If, on the other hand you want more, then let's talk.

Why is it that so little has changed? Why is it that after the programs of the 1980s, the meetings called by presidents, the work of groups like the National Council for History Education, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, countless universities and teachers and concerned citizen groups that overall Americans' knowledge of history is getting worse?

Just what is the problem?

MY FELLOW CITIZENS, the problem is us. The problem is our system, the problem is our values and ironically the problem is our very sense of freedom we want our children to hold dear.

Trust me I am not bashing America here. We are indeed the freest country on the planet. Unfortunately it is that very freedom that prevents us from solving this crisis.

Consider that freedom, in many ways, can be defined by as little government interference in everyday life as possible, *laissez faire* as the French would say. The more government controls us and tells us what to do, (whether it be for our own good or not), the less freedom we have.

Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt, one a Republican and the other a Democrat, forever changed the role of government by dramatically increasing its role in our lives. Despite this, I believe that we still live in a society where government today is extremely weak when it comes to controlling our everyday lives and the lessons we learn in schools.

Compare our government if you will, to others both good and bad. The Japanese government, for example, takes a direct role in everything from the economy and education to the influence foreigners have on the country. For a tiny set of islands with few natural resources, they seem to be doing quite well—at least economically.

Or, for comparison sake, look at what the mind control and propaganda machines of Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union did to the education systems and power of their respective countries. I'm not suggesting a totalitarian state, but can you imagine how quickly our education problems could be solved if our government wielded more power?

Is it a paradox that will destroy democracies? Does the definition of a free society prevent government from exercising enough power to make sure that its citizens are educated enough about its own culture and values to carry it onto the next generation?

Quite a scary thought huh?

Okay, now before I get to philosophical on you, let's get a little more specific in what this means for the problems in today's education system. American public schools are controlled at the local level. The most powerful influences on your child's education are the state mandates set by your legislature and governor. Remember in Chapter Four how I discussed the low historical standards states place on students? Local school boards play a significant role in setting curriculum and can be the deciding factor in doing so based on how much control the state exerts and how much money it provides to the school system. Schools therefore, are extremely diverse even in individual states based upon the specific factors and needs of each individual community.

Some people would argue that this is how it should be. This is what America is about and if anyone should have control over their child's education, it should be the people in the local community. No one wants Washington deciding what our children should learn.

²⁹ Fleming, Sue. "US History Stumps Many High School Seniors."

Reuters Limited, 2002, Thu May 9, 2:03 PM ET .

http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&u=/nm/20020509/ts_nm/life_history_dc_2

Let us all recognize first and foremost therefore that while the history crisis is a national problem it cannot be solved by the national government unless there is a substantial change in the status quo. This is one of the reasons why the National Council for History Education is effective in certain states like Ohio and almost unheard of in my own state of Florida. In essence, education reform is a haphazard, uncoordinated, and sometimes random association of concerned citizens in pockets all over the country.

Despite over two hundred years of American democracy, in my opinion there has never been any kind of substantial coordinated national effort that has had any chance of making a difference.

Except one, textbooks are a national power. They control education throughout the fifty states and are a billion dollar industry. What chance does an individual state have or what chance does a local school system have in any real reform efforts when almost the entire budget is spent on textbooks and classroom teachers use the books 70-90% of the time?

Again, I am not claiming that there are six or seven textbook cronies sitting around a table as we speak and plotting to control the minds of our youth. However, the end result is not far from that kind of a situation when we have no other national power deciding what Americans should learn.

Let me repeat, the textbook issue is not the only problem. But by studying this issue we can discern how education might be reformed if there is a real national agenda behind history education.

But what should that national power be? Again, we do not want to have Washington, D.C. control our children's minds. We do not want some propaganda machine like Dr. Goebbels, establishing goals and values for our children. Although I think that if the desire was there, common ground could be found among all fifty states encompassing a basic core of values that all Americans would want to see in their children.

National power means Washington, D.C., doesn't it? In America, in our federal system, with the desire for limited government that we have, a national answer is not going to occur anytime soon.

But wait. Aren't we the government? In a democracy, the people are the rulers and the leaders carry out their desires. At least that is the theory.

If I am sounding cynical or silly to you it's because I want to show how much change is needed before any change can begin. Clearly, the only way to effect any real national change in the ability of our citizens to carry on our democracy is for there to be a fundamental shift in the very values our society holds dear.

Education is not a value we hold dear.

Let me rephrase that. Education is not a value we hold dear on a national level. We want to control it locally. We want to be able to see what Johnny is learning, we want to have a say in what he is being exposed to and we can only do that if we can control it locally.

I have always found it sadly humorous how every four years voters ask the president what he is going to do about education. I am sure you have heard it debated in presidential campaigns. and you probably remember how President George H. W. Bush claimed he would be the Education President. This reinforces my point about uneducated voters. How many people voted for a president based on his stance on education without realizing or knowing that the president has very little control at all?

There are some excellent schools. There are some excellent teachers. There are some excellent students. There are graduates out there who can quote Thomas Jefferson and Mark Twain. They can recite amendments from the Constitution or explain to you the fundamental arguments in a multitude of Supreme Court cases. They can even "recognize ambition in every form and prepare themselves to defeat it." (Jefferson, remember chapter 2?)

Unfortunately, these people are haphazardly spread all over the country. They come from all states and all communities. They come from local districts that have lots of money to spend, or a galvanized community or a proactive school board or a superior school or even a superb core of dedicated teachers.

The problem of course is that there is no unity. These great schools are scattered leaving an overwhelming majority of American students deprived of an education that will make them successful citizens. Worse still, because there are good and even great schools, the reaction by everyday citizens to alarm bells or warnings such as mine is often to focus on the problems in their own community. While this can lead to some change, we find that the only schools that do change are the ones who for the most part were not that bad off in the first place.

Until there is a national movement to truly address the history education problems in our country at the grass roots level there will be no substantial change. The president cannot do it. The Congress cannot do it. Not even state government has enough power, with the possible exceptions of California and Texas, to deal with the overwhelming problems that our national society has created. As long as we remain the dis-united states of America when it comes to history education reform, we will find ourselves subject to the whims of those powers and forces that are united nationally in controlling our education system.

This leads us to my dream and I really believe it is a dream, although not completely unattainable. After all, this is part of the reason I am writing this book. Imagine, if you will, a country where history education is a true

national priority. Where the best minds in the country graduate from college and instead of going on to be corporate executives or law partners they go on to become teachers. Imagine students who dream of serving their country, not by going into the military, but by dedicating their lives to helping young people learn. (I am not knocking the armed forces here. They have their place in society and I am proud of my own father who served in the army.) Imagine the kinds of citizens and leaders we could produce if all of America rose up and said, *We want more for our country and for our youth.*

Finally, imagine if the government really did recognize that its most solemn duty to our founding fathers and our Constitution was not simply to protect freedom and allow businesses to set our education priorities but instead to make sure that American democracy continued forever through the minds of our youth.

Chapter Eleven - So, What's Left ?

BY NOW YOU should be wondering if I am an extremist. In Chapter Nine, I described an extreme where very little could be done about our history crisis and left you with a sense of every man for themselves. In Chapter Ten, I looked at the other extreme and described a dream world where all the major problems of American history education would be solved.

Is there a middle ground? Perhaps.

Again, I remind you that I am not an education reformer. I am a teacher. There are professionals in history education reform who have made countless suggestions and are trying many methods to fix the problems. The ideas I suggest therefore have not necessarily been researched nor have they been tested in any scientific method. If upon reflection by you and others they make no realistic sense or if they foster even better ideas than so be it.

As with any educational system there are two major contributors, the educators and the students. Each must perform their function well in order for there to be true success. Part of the problem we have had is that reforms have tended to focus on one or the other and rarely on both.

Accountability

THERE HAS BEEN a major move in some states and within the bureaucracy in Washington, D.C., to return (introduce?) accountability to teaching. Yet, accountability is a dangerous concept. How do you measure knowledge? How can you evaluate the increased critical thinking ability of students in a way that is fair to all the various levels of intelligence as well as factor in societal and cultural differences across the spectrum?

How can you evaluate teachers and schools when learning is at least a twelve-year process? Was it Johnny's fourth grade teacher who messed him up or was it his third? Was he a good student until he got into high school? Was that really a good teacher or was he just the lucky one who was given well prepared students or who was allowed to teach the honors classes?

The questions and variables in measuring accountability are almost infinite. It seems to me that until recently, educators and politicians, with a little push from teacher's unions, had decided that since it was so difficult to measure accountability, that it shouldn't be used.

Not only do I disagree with this idea but I also disagree with the reformers of today who claim that accountability is the answer. Under a quick fix, get elected banner, many people have said that testing, testing, testing is the answer. Test the child, test the school, hold them accountable and if they fail, let them go to another school.

This harsh, sometimes heartless approach has met volumes of criticism especially in my home state of Florida where the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT) is used to retain students, fail schools, give out reward checks to the successful and cause immeasurable stress to children as young as seven and eight years old.

Yet, the FCAT and other tests do have a point. We do need to hold students accountable. We do need to hold teachers and schools accountable. We just need to find fair, varied ways of measuring not only student knowledge, but also student skills.

Ever since I began teaching Advanced Placement History, I have seen the benefits of a good test. Unlike the FCAT where teachers teach to the test and they have FCAT days and children learn as my twelve-year-old daughter once said, *nothing but FCAT*, the advanced placement tests in history cover such a wide variety of skills and knowledge that it is very difficult to teach to the test. In addition, it is filled with essay questions and document analysis and all the judgment and critical thinking analyses you would want a student to have. A student who passes an AP test not only knows his or her stuff but also has the skills necessary to succeed. Why else would so many public and private universities use them as a measuring stick?

Now before you think that I am receiving kickbacks from the AP, let me say that testing is only one way to gauge accountability. In addition, if you are going to hold teachers and schools accountable, you must give them the resources they need and the support they need in order to achieve the goals you want them to have.

None of what I have just said is very new and I am sure it has been said before in more detail and eloquence than I just did. The real problem, I believe, is that accountability has too often been put on the school or on the teacher while the child and most importantly the parent is let off the hook.

Most people would argue that with the rights we are given as Americans, that there are responsibilities that

come with them. Unfortunately, many Americans limit those responsibilities to obeying the laws and paying their taxes. If we are going to change our society to get more from our young people, we must address the responsibility issue in much more detail.

Can we tie in rights to responsibilities? Can we say that you only have such and such rights if you perform such and such acts? That is a controversial idea, I know but here are some examples of what we could do.

The most fundamental right in our democracy is the right to vote. Originally, the writers of the Constitution believed that only intelligent people should vote. As the years went by, more and more people gained the right to vote. The problem however is that as this right was given, it was often abused with some of the worst abuses coming in the mid 19th century as politicians in New York City from Tammany Hall bought votes under Boss Tweed's direction. Over the past century, republicans and democrats have sought out more and more people to vote in order to gain office. Indeed, today we see both political parties actually driving people to the ballot box in order to vote. In Rochester, NY, local democrats actually discussed an idea of giving out beer to people if they came to vote.³⁰ Of course, the parties claim that they want to make sure that everyone who wants to vote gets a chance to vote but we all know that they are doing this to make sure they get elected. Do they ever ask the person if they know anything about the issues?

Today's voters many times are not informed about the issues they vote on. Those who believe they are informed may not truly understand the economic and political ramifications of their vote or have been misled by the 30-second television ad that they were exposed to. Worse still, do you think there was even one person who voted for Governors Jesse Ventura or Arnold Schwarzenegger because they thought he was cool? (Not to take anything away from these men. After all, Ronald Reagan was an actor and many would argue that he was a great president.) Even one vote cast irresponsibly could destroy an election.

I am not an elitist trying to deny the common man the right to vote. Nor do I believe we could ever have voting tests to measure a person's ability to decide on the issue. The Jim Crow laws used against blacks in the south to prevent them from voting by the white majority has made sure we could never bring voting tests back.

However, isn't there something we could do to tie in this most basic right to the responsibility of using it correctly? I know of all the ramifications and complications involved. For example, the person who cannot read but is quite intelligent. But, when my lord, over 50% of America's graduating seniors can not pass the basic test required by immigrants to enter the country something isn't right.³¹

Our attitude of rights, rights, rights must be balanced with the responsibility to our nation and each other if we are to maintain our freedom.

The government, especially, has forgotten this. After all, who is going to get elected saying, "we need Americans to be more responsible"? Actually, someone did get elected that way. Remember John F. Kennedy and "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country"?

There are many things our government can do to insure students succeed if they have the courage to demand. The ultimate question is whether change will come from an enraged public, initiated by a bold leader, or not at all. After World War II, for example, the GI bill subsidized education and gave low interests loans to thousands of returning GI's. Imagine the message sent to our aspiring teachers who aren't sure whether they should enter the classroom or the corporate boardroom if something similar was done for teachers?

This kind of tactic could also be used with businesses. Consider this for a minute. Every business in America benefits from the education system we have. In addition, some reformers claim that we need to place the free enterprise system more firmly in schools. They argue for school choice and competition. Have they considered the most basic of all free enterprise ideas, pay for what you buy?

Business gets the benefit of thousands of dollars spent on each student over the course of their education career. They pay nothing for this benefit. Imagine if they did. Imagine the motivation schools would have to educate their youth if business had to pay a finder's fee to the school that educated the individual they hired. Even if it was a small amount, this could make a huge difference and they could start up another business or two in the process with all the recruitments.

³⁰ Spector, Josh and Arbelo, Enid. *Free beer if you register to vote*. Democrat and Chronicle.com, June 18, 2004 http://www.rochesterdandc.com/news/0618SM4KQJ4_news.shtml

³¹ Pleming, Sue. "US History Stumps Many High School Seniors."

Reuters Limited, 2002, Thu May 9, 2:03 PM ET .

http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&u=/nm/20020509/ts_nm/life_history_dc_2

Some or all of these ideas may come off sounding irresponsible and naive. Yet, the idea I am trying to get across is that government can do something if it has the will to do it. Government can be bold, it can be brave and most importantly it can set a new standard for our country if it is willing to take risks.

In 1930, President Franklin Roosevelt gave America a New Deal, creating programs and a society that are still in force today. When considering the long-term future of our country is our education crisis any less dangerous than the Great Depression was?

Let's return now to my true field of expertise. The above ranting and ravings are my ideas on overall education reform. However good or bad those ideas are, they are not my specialty. History is.

How then do we resolve the problem that this book focuses around? How specifically do we improve history education?

I am not going to repeat all that I have just said about education. Suffice it to say that everything we have said about the political will need to be changed for education is doubly so for history education. Science and math are nowhere near in as much danger as teaching students about presidents Jefferson and Lincoln. In general therefore, the basic answer is that the only way to ensure that our children know their history and can perpetuate our culture is for enough of us to care to do something about it.

Meanwhile, what specifically can be done to fix history education? As we discussed in Chapter Eight, many reformers such as NCHE already have excellent ideas that merely need to be implemented on a grander scale. The one thing that still needs to be addressed, indeed that is essential if any substantial change is to occur has been largely ignored. This is the concept that art must be returned to history education. Today's history classes are more like statistics classes. Since history is a lot more than who did what and when, we need to get the emotion, the desires, the loves and passions, the victories and defeats back into the classroom.

The only way to do this is to change the textbooks. The only way to change the textbooks is to stop buying them. The only way to stop buying them is to have another option available.

Those options are here now. We just need to decide to use them. From the Internet, to novels, to diaries, to movies, the stories of American history are everywhere. We just need to tell them.

Finally, we need to get the storyteller back. We need our history teachers to tell stories. We need them to excite our students. We need them to energize our students. We need them to make kids realize that history is about them, that it is exciting and powerful and can help them in ways they could never begin to realize.

Once this has happened, once a student has fallen in love with the stories, they will love history forever. And finally after that, they can open up a textbook.

Chapter Twelve - Where Are We Headed?

WE HISTORIANS TEND to think big. We see major world and national events and we recognize trends and patterns in history. We compare the fall of Rome to the fall of America and we hope and pray that we are wrong.

Truth be told, no one knows where we are headed, not even the noted astronomer Nostradamus. However, if humans have any fault it is not looking forward enough to recognize the implications of their actions. Fortunately, that is changing. Environmentalists are beginning to tie in our actions to future global warming. Physicists and politicians are making plans for space travel and exploration. New forms of energy are being researched as we realize what we are doing to the planet. Even politicians recognize the dangers in issues such as nuclear proliferation and rogue nations. Measures are finally being taken to prepare humanity for the future.

Even education is being addressed. Reforms are being made. Changes are being sought and problems are being recognized. The question is whether we will do enough and in time to preserve our nation. It may sound melodramatic and corny but children really *are* the future. In a society that depends on the perpetuation of its history and its ideals for survival, children are the essence of our democracy.

In this book I have tried to portray the problems of teaching history to our children. These are real problems that are not being resolved. Teachers are less prepared and good teachers are in short supply. Schools are facing more budget crises resulting in more cutbacks in the teaching of history. Most importantly, the awesome power of the textbook continues to steamroll through any substantial reform.

I wrote this book because I believe Americans need to be aware of how serious the problem is and how much we need to change our way of thinking in order to fix it. Until we all truly understand the problem, we will continue to be fooled by fancy slogans, promises and other political bandages. Only a fundamental shift in the way we teach our children, to include a shift in our priorities and in our attitudes, can bring the necessary change needed to truly solve our problems. Anything less than that, to use a Titanic analogy, may slow the ship down, may make the passengers feel better but it won't change the direction enough to avoid the iceberg.

It is my hope that the knowledge shared in this book will energize some people to do something. The only way real change can happen is if enough of us force a change on society itself and not just in our own local schools and classrooms.

A Last Reminder

IF YOU WANT to help out, spread the word and get involved. Contact your legislators and your school boards. Join politically active organizations or form your own. Both the National Council for the Social Studies, www.ncss.org, and the National Council for History Education, <http://www.history.org/nche>, have advocacy sections on their web sites for those who want to do something about the problem. Don't be fooled by quick answers or simple solutions. Get to know your schools, the issues and the different proposals.

As a teacher, a parent and lover of this great democracy of ours, I beg you to consider my words. Indeed, I would welcome any words of advice, suggestions or comments you have. I would welcome the chance to speak to your group or give a presentation on the issues raised in this book. And finally, I know it's a long shot, but I would hope that maybe, just maybe, enough people could act together that maybe we could influence our fellow citizens and leaders to make the changes that are so desperately needed.

Please contact me at historycrisis@youngheroesofhistory.com if you have anything to say.

About the Author - Alan N. Kay

ALAN N. KAY, M.Ed., is a father of three children, a high school teacher and author living in Florida. He is a cum laude graduate of Brandeis University and has been teaching in the public schools for fifteen years.

Mr. Kay has won numerous awards including most recently the 2005 Preserve America Florida History Teacher of the Year, the 2004 Pinellas County Teacher of the Year, the 2002 Daughters of the American Revolution National Outstanding American History Teacher of the Year award, the D.A.R. Florida 2002 Outstanding American History Teacher of the Year Award, the 2001 Florida History Fair Teacher of the Year, and a finalist for the 2001 National History Day Teacher of the Year.

Kay is known for creative teaching as well as creative writing. He is the initiator and coordinator of the Pinellas County History Day, and has taken students to the state level each year since 1999. Kay has also developed award-winning curriculum for teachers and given many workshops on education topics such as teaching the Civil War, using historical fiction in the classroom and how to participate in History Day.

Kay began writing children's historical fiction fifteen years ago. He is the author of a series of historical fiction books titled *Young Heroes of History*, has published a short book entitled *Jamestown Journey* and served as a consultant for the Florida historical album. He currently teaches American and world history at East Lake High School in Florida.

For more information, see his website www.youngheroesofhistory.com.

Appendix 1

Testimony of Gilbert Sewall, from the American Textbook Council to the Senate Committee on Intellectual Diversity

Author's Note: The history crisis is so alarming that the United States senate is holding hearings on related educational issues. The following statements are from the testimony of Gilbert Sewall from the American Textbook Council to the Senate Committee on Intellectual Diversity. His words are both enlightening and frightening and apply to all education disciplines.³²

United States Senate Witness Testimony

Full Committee hearing on Intellectual Diversity

Bill Number: Oversight

Hearing Date: September 24, 2003 - 10:00 AM

Witness: Gilbert Sewall Director, American Textbook Council New York, New York

Testimony:

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee:

My experience with history textbooks and publishing goes back some twenty-five years. In 1978, I was the co-author of an American history textbook, *After Hiroshima: The U.S.A. since 1945*. For fourteen years, I have been director of the American Textbook Council, an independent New York-based educational organization that reviews history textbooks and social studies curricula. It is dedicated to improving instructional materials and civic education nationwide.

Since 1989, the Council has identified many problems with history textbooks. In American Textbook Council reports and in persuasive books such as Sandra Stotsky's, *Losing Our Language*, and Diane Ravitch's, *The Language Police*, textbook critics reach the same conclusions. Textbook content is thinner and thinner, and what there is, is increasingly deformed by identity politics and pressure groups.

The first history textbook problem is what educators, critics and journalists informally refer to as "dumbing down." Many history textbooks reflect lowered sights for general education. They raise basic questions about sustaining literacy and civic understanding in a democratic polity and culture. Bright photographs, broken format and seductive color overwhelm the text and confuse the page. Typeface is larger and looser, resulting in many fewer words and much more white space. The text disappears or gets lost. Among editors, phrases such as "text-heavy," "information-loaded," "fact-based," and "non-visual" are negatives. A picture, they insist, tells a thousand words.

This declining textbook quality is neither a right nor a left issue. Publishers are adjusting to short attention spans and non-readers. Too many children cannot or do not want to read history, which contains concrete facts and complicated concepts, reading that requires some facility with language. So textbooks become picture and activity books instead.

The second history textbook problem—increasing content bias and distortion—involves political judgments. The critique of distorted content in history is, of course, a problematic one. One person's distortion is another's correction. Yet the list of textbook activists grows. It spans gender, ethnic, religious, environmental and nutrition causes that want to use textbooks to advance their agendas. New heroes in leading textbooks—Mansa Masu, Anne Hutchinson, Rigoberta Menchu, Chico Mendez, and Anita Hill—are designed to advance a political agenda that highlights and ennobles people of color, peace advocates, anti-colonialists, environmentalists, and wronged women. One-time historical giants like Julius Caesar and Marcus Aurelius, Copernicus and Magellan, George Washington and Napoleon, Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud, Albert Schweitzer and Winston Churchill play supporting roles.

The defenders of the revised history textbooks claim that textbooks used to be racist, sexist, ethnocentric, and jingoistic, and now they're not. This is a political half-truth, a spurious and calculated claim, but it has been an

³² This text can be found on the American Textbook Council's website <http://www.historytextbooks.org/index.htm>

effective one.

A large part of the problem rests with the textbook publishers. The consolidation of educational publishing from a domain where many independent, competing companies created and sold textbooks has changed the field. Today, four defensive, revenue-driven multinational corporations—Pearson, Houghton Mifflin, Harcourt and McGraw-Hill—offer fewer and fewer standard textbooks for states and teachers to choose from.

None of these publishing giants shows the least interest in innovation, change or offering books that come closer to meeting the wishes of textbook critics and state-level curriculum reformers. Instead, publishers cater to pressure groups for whom history textbook content is an extension of a broader political or cultural cause. They make books whose content is meant to suit the sensitivities of groups and causes more interested in self-promotion than in historical fact, scholarly appraisal, or balance. They are, more likely than not, listening to the wrong voices.

Unlike in the college textbook market, where authors write their own books and market shares for each textbook are small, “el-hi” history textbook authors have such minimal control over their product that authorship is to be doubted. The big names become involved—i.e., lend their names to the enterprise—for the money. Publishers have shrunk their editorial and production staffs, moving toward a writing-for-hire production system and abandoning the royalty-based author system. Some new secondary-level history textbooks have no authors at all. Authors have been replaced by a long list of contributors, censors, and special pleaders, concerned first of all that history meets the standards of multiculturalism.

When multiculturalism promised a reformed social studies curriculum of “inclusion” in the 1980s and early 1990s, its almost universal appeal lay in its pledge to broaden the nation’s understanding of minorities and ordinary people who had been unduly ignored by “presidential” and “elitist” history. Thus multiculturalism calls for a reformed history of new voices with a distinct political subtext. The American epic is transformed into a fight and triumph over white, elite, patriarchal, “European” oppression. From the age of exploration to the present day a slanted, anti-traditionalist, shaming story of oppression runs as a thematic thread.

National history standards developed in 1993 and 1994 provided outlines and thematic cues for social studies publishers involved in textbook content revision. These standards ratified historical content and themes that social studies editors had been incorporating into textbooks for longer than a decade, changes often being made under activist pressure. But content makeovers had occurred unbeknownst to most people except textbook publishers, curriculum specialists, and political activists, which is the main reason they were greeted with such public alarm and condemnation in the Senate in 1995. The historian Gordon S. Wood of Brown University said of these history disputes: “So what might seem to be a petty academic debate about the nature of historical writing in fact has momentous implications for the kind of nation that we Americans want to be.”

The collaboration of educational publishers with pressure groups and textbook censors is disturbing. Determining what history children will learn, who will be heroes and villains, what themes will dominate, and what message will be sent are crucial subtexts in civic education. At worst, biased instructional materials are undermining students’ appreciation for America and citizenship. In American history—establishment of responsible government, development of a national economy, extension of democracy to blacks and women, influence in world affairs, a rising standard of living for most if not all—seems the main casualty of the multicultural idea.

Massachusetts, Virginia and California have all produced strong history standards. Still, a gulf exists between state standards and textbook content. California adopts textbooks through a state-level process. The most recent history adoptions in California (1999) and Texas (2002) indicate that these two key states are no longer really selective about the history textbooks that they adopt. Nor can they be, given the problem of four mega-publishers that exert iron control over the market.

Publishers claim that they are only responding to state pressure and state standards. They say the state adoption process is already an open, public process. In fact, textbooks that states adopt may conform minimally and mechanically to state standards. State and local textbook adoption procedures rarely, if ever, address matters of style and textual quality. The main point of state review, as far as I can discern, is to comply with detailed guidelines for representation and to give pressure groups a chance to vent and bully.

Publishers should be producing cheaper books that are more text-centered, simpler in design, and more honest in content. They are failing to do so.

Meanwhile, a growing number of concerned educators and parents of all political stripes are asking for history textbooks that are easy-to-read and understand, that tell a story, that are compact, legible and accurate, that do not “jump around.” They want history textbooks free of the political pressure groups willing to corrupt schoolbook history in order to advance their single interest. The four giants in education publishing are ignoring these commendable efforts in order to maximize revenues.

Thank you.

Source: http://help.senate.gov/testimony/084_tes.html

Appendix 2

Crisis in History: A Statement

The following statement from the National Council of History Education has been reprinted with permission from the authors and the council. To view and sign the statement, go to: <http://www.history.org/nche/>.

Editor's Note: Earlier this summer NCHE Trustee Theodore K. Rabb of Princeton University was asked, by a bipartisan group of U.S. Senators concerned about the state of history instruction in our schools, to draft a statement about the need for further action beyond the Teaching American History Grant Program that has been passed by Congress in recent years and the American History Achievement Act that is pending before the Senate. What follows is that statement, which he drafted together with NCHE Trustee Byron Hollinshead of American Historical Publications. In accordance with the Senators' wishes, it has been circulated to a distinguished roster of public figures, historians, leaders of historical organizations, Pulitzer Prize winners, and educators who have endorsed its goals. That list of signatories is appended to the statement, but its impact would be greatly enhanced if, as we hope, a large number of members of NCHE will be willing to add their names to the list. To indicate your support of the Statement, please [click here](#) and follow the directions. Co-signers will be adding their names as individuals with their affiliations only as identification.-

Whereas, to quote Senator Lamar Alexander, "American history is our children's worst subject";

Whereas, to quote the 1988 report of the Bradley Commission on History in the Schools:

"History belongs in the school programs of all students, regardless of the academic standing and preparation,... because it provides the only avenue we have to reach an understanding of ourselves and of our society.

Without such understanding, the two foremost aims of American education will not be achieved—the preparation of all our people for private lives of personal integrity and fulfillment, and their preparation for public life as democratic citizens"; and

Whereas, to address this problem and this need, two major shortcomings of America's educational system—

(a) the inadequate time given to history instruction, especially in the early grades; and

(b) the inadequate training in content demanded of teachers of history;

—require urgent attention;

We, the undersigned, many of us members of the National Council for History Education (the sole nation-wide membership organization devoted to the improvement of the teaching of history in our schools), submit this statement on the CRISIS IN HISTORY in order to urge the Congress of the United States to expand on the Teaching American History initiative and Senate Bill 2721, the American History Achievement Act, by taking the following steps:

1. Given the emphasis on Reading in the No Child Left Behind legislation, we recommend the adoption of guidelines to ensure that the texts used to teach reading include a substantial proportion of biographies and other works of history;
2. Given the excellent History curricula that have been adopted in a number of States, we recommend that, as an amendment to the No Child Left Behind legislation, States and localities (the determiners of educational policy) be encouraged to adopt substantial requirements for the teaching of history in the first eight grades; and
3. Given the success of the Teaching American History initiative and Senate Bill 2721, the American History Achievement Act, in improving the preparation of teachers of history, we recommend:
 - (i) that both these programs be expanded;
 - (ii) that funds be provided for all States to offer such programs; and
 - (iii) that funds be provided for all Schools of Education to offer intensive preparation in the content of History as part of the education of teachers of history.

Signed by:

Edward L. Ayers, Professor of History & Dean, Arts & Sciences, University of Virginia

Bernard Bailyn, Professor Emeritus of History, Harvard University, Pulitzer Prize Winner, Former President, AHA
James G. Basker, Barnard College and Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History
Douglas Brinkley, Director, Eisenhower Center, University of New Orleans
Spencer R. Crew, Executive Director, National Underground RR Freedom Center, Former Director, National Museum of American History; Chair, NCHE Board of Trustees
The Honorable Thomas F. Eagleton, Former US Senator From Missouri
Sharon Flack, Coordinator of Social Studies, West Virginia Dept. of Education
Eric Foner, Professor of History, Columbia University, Former President, OAH & AHA
John Hope Franklin, Professor Emeritus of History, Duke University, Former President, OAH & AHA
Richard Gilder, Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History
Vartan Gregorian, President, The Carnegie Corporation of New York
Victor Hanson, Senior Fellow, The Hoover Institute, Stanford University
Byron Hollinshead, President & CEO, American Historical Publications, Former Chair, National History Day
Akira Iriye, Professor of History, Harvard University, Former President, AHA
Kenneth T. Jackson, Professor of History, Columbia University, Former OAH President & NCHE Chair
Donald Kagan, Professor of History, Yale University
David Kennedy, Professor of History, Stanford University, Pulitzer Prize Winner
Linda Kerber, Professor of History, University of Iowa, Former President, OAH
Henry Kiernan, Incoming Chair, NCHE
Cynthia M. Koch, Hyde Park, NY
Lewis E. Lehrman, Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History
William E. Leuchtenburg, Professor Emeritus of History, University of North Carolina, Former President, OAH & AHA
David McCullough, West Tisbury, MA, Pulitzer Prize Winner
Mary Beth Norton, Professor of History, Cornell University
Georgia Nugent, President, Kenyon College
Nell Irvin Painter, Professor of History, Princeton University
Theodore K. Rabb, Professor of History, Princeton University, Former Chair, NCHE
Diane Ravitch, Professor of Education, New York University
Elaine W. Reed, Executive Director, NCHE
Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Professor of History Emeritus, CUNY, Pulitzer Prize Winner
Fritz Stern Columbia University
Sam Wineburg, Professor of Education, Stanford University
Gordon Wood, Professor of History, Brown University, Pulitzer Prize Winner.

AHA = American Historical Association;

NCHE = National Council for History Education;

OAH = Organization of American Historians.-

The remainder of the statement includes too many people to list here. To become a co-signer of this statement, go to <http://www.history.org/nche/>, click on "Crisis in History, A statement," and follow the directions. Co-signers will be adding their names as individuals with their affiliations only as identification.

Appendix 3 History Crisis Issues

The following resources are designed for teachers, parents, students and lovers of history. You can use all of these directly or if you want to be able to quickly click on all of these, go to www.ilovehistoryonline.com to view everything in its entirety.

Resources-Organizations

Legislative Update from the National Council of Social Studies
<http://www.socialstudies.org/legislative/>

National Council of Social Studies gives advice on how to help
<http://www.socialstudies.org/advocacy/>

Florida Council for the Social Studies gives advice on how to help that works in many states
<http://www.fcss.org/advocacy.cfm>

Organization of American Historians News of the Profession
<http://www.oah.org/pubs/nl/2005may/newsprof.html?emtm0505s>

Save our History is a program sponsored by the History Channel
<http://www.saveourhistory.com/>

The American Textbook Council
<http://www.historytextbooks.org/index.htm>

For some good sources go the National Council For History Education's home page and click on the resource page
<http://www.history.org/nche/>

Why history teachers are not prepared: An opinion piece followed by links to more data. Put together by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation
<http://www.edexcellence.net/foundation/topic/topic.cfm?topic=Teachers%20%26%20Principals>

Dr. Frank Wang on Textbooks
<http://www.wangeducation.com/editorials.shtml>

Studies, government actions and surveys

President Introduces History & Civic Education Initiatives
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020917-1.html>

A survey commissioned by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
http://www.prnewswire.com/broadcast/5027/5027_consumer.html

History Education in the United States: A Survey of Teacher Certification and State-Based Standards and Assessments for Teachers and Students
<http://www.oah.org/reports/surveys/50state/>

Effective State Standards for U.S. History: A 2003 Report Card
<http://www.edexcellence.net/foundation/publication/publication.cfm?id=320>

Report of the Committee of Ten, 1892. An report on the state of American Education. Included such conference participants as the future President Woodrow Wilson
<http://tmh.floonet.net/books/commoften/mainrpt.html>

Opinions

The Danger of Historical Amnesia: A Conversation with Writer David McCullough
<http://www.neh.gov/news/humanities/2002-07/danger.html>

The Importance of Studying History, a speech by David McCullough
http://www.nationalbook.org/nbaacceptspeech_dmccullough.html

Recent book on the problems in History Education by award winning teacher, Alan Kay
<http://www.youngheroesofhistory.com/americanhistorycrisis.htm>

Richard Feynman one of the pre-eminent physicists of the twentieth century on the textbook selection process.
<http://www.redshift.com/~jmichael/html/feynman.html>

Teaching of History by Non-Historians Discussion
http://www.h-net.org/~shear/thread/teaching_of_history_by_non_historians.htm

College seniors don't know history, news article.
http://www.statenews.com/editions/022400/p1_history.html

Why social studies teachers don't teach history and what to do about it.
<http://www.edexcellence.net/foundation/gadfly/issue.cfm?id=57#837>

Twisting History and Fabricating Facts
http://www.edexcellence.net/foundation/about/press_release.cfm?id=8

Where Did Social Studies Go Wrong?
<http://www.edexcellence.net/foundation/publication/publication.cfm?id=317>

The Mad, Mad World of Textbook Adoption
<http://www.edexcellence.net/foundation/publication/publication.cfm?id=335>

A Consumer's Guide to High School History Textbooks
<http://www.edexcellence.net/foundation/publication/publication.cfm?id=329>

The Stealth Curriculum: Manipulating America's History Teachers
<http://www.edexcellence.net/foundation/publication/publication.cfm?id=331>

History News Network by Sam Wineburg
<http://www.historynewsnetwork.org/articles/article.html?id=761>

Why Study History? by Peter N. Stearns
<http://www.historians.org/pubs/Free/WhyStudyHistory.htm>

Why Study History? By William H. McNeill
<http://www.kwc.edu/academic/history/whyhist.htm>

Appendix 4

History Organizations

The following resources are designed for teachers, parents, students and lovers of history. You can use all of these directly or if you want to be able to quickly click on all of these, go to www.ilovehistoryonline.com to view everything in its entirety.

History Organizations

National Council for History Education
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National History Day
<http://www.nationalhistoryday.org/>

National Center for History in the Schools
<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/nchs/>

Thomas B. Fordham Foundation Think tank on America's schools. Many good articles.
<http://www.edexcellence.net/foundation/global/index.cfm>

History News Network
<http://hnn.us/>

H-NCH is the official electronic voice of the National Coalition for History, a Washington D.C. based non-profit educational organization.
<http://www.h-net.org/~nch/>

For individual State Historical Societies, click below and scroll to bottom. This is compiled by the Organization of American Historians.
<http://www.oah.org/announce/links.html>

Individual State Council for the Social Studies Web Pages can be found at:
<http://www.socialstudies.org/local/>

Organization of American Historians. Click on the link below to find links to the all the sites listed.
<http://www.oah.org/announce/links.html>

American Association for the History of Medicine
American Association for State and Local History (AASLH)
American Historical Association
American Jewish Historical Society
American Studies Association
Center for History and New Media
Center for the Study of the American South
Conference of Historical Journals
Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History
The Historical Society
H-Net: Humanities On-Line
Indiana University Oral History Research Center
The Library of Congress
Maryland Center for the Study of History and Civic Education

National Archives and Records Administration
Our Documents Project
National Coalition for History
National Council for History Education
National Council for the Social Studies
National Council on Public History
National History Day
National History Standards / National Center for History in the Schools
National Park Service History in the Parks
Directory of National Park Service Historians
National Trust for Historic Preservation
New Jersey Historical Commission
New Jersey History Partnership
Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture
Oral History Association
Politics and History Page, UCLA
Public History Resource Center
Social Science History Association
Social Studies School Service
Society for Historians of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era
Society for History in the Federal Government
Southern Historical Association
Smithsonian Institution
U.S. Library of Congress
Western History Association

Appendix 5 History Education Authors

The following resources are designed for teachers, parents, students and lovers of history. You can use all of these directly or if you want to be able to quickly click on all of these, go to www.ilovehistoryonline.com to view everything in its entirety.

DR. PAUL GAGNON was a nationally known authority on history education and the principal investigator for a groundbreaking 1988 report, “Building a History Curriculum: Guidelines for Teaching History in Schools.” He made a career out of challenging schools to make history an academic priority, and he worked to set educational standards for students in urban schools.

In 1965, he was the principal drafter of the University of Massachusetts - Boston statement of purpose and then served as dean of faculty there until 1970.

He is the author of *France Since 1789* (Harper & Row 1972) and several published papers. He also wrote two cover stories for *The Atlantic* magazine—the November 1989 cover article “Why Study History?” and the December 1995 cover article “What Should Children Learn?”

In honor of his dedication to history education, the National Council for History Education is establishing the Paul A. Gagnon Award. The annual award will be given to a teacher for continuing scholarship or outstanding achievement in the promotion of history in schools.

His most relevant book is, *Democracy’s half-told story: What American history textbooks should add.* (American Federation of Teachers, 1989)

E.D. HIRSCH JR. is a distinguished visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution and a member of the Koret Task Force on K–12 Education. Hirsch is the founder and chairman of the nonprofit Core Knowledge Foundation and professor emeritus of education and humanities at the University of Virginia.

He is the author of several acclaimed books on education issues including the best-seller *Cultural Literacy* (Houghton Mifflin) and *The Schools We Need and Why We Don’t Have Them* (Doubleday), which was recognized by the *New York Times* as one of its Notable Books of 1996. He also contributed the chapter “Research-Based Education Policy” to *What’s Gone Wrong in America’s Classrooms* by Hoover Institution research fellow and fellow Koret Task Force member Williamson Evers.

Additional works by Hirsch include *Books to Build On* (coeditor) and *The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, (Houghton Mifflin, 2002) which has been translated into Chinese, Dutch, German, Japanese, and Swedish. Some of Hirsch’s other books have been translated into Hungarian and Italian.

JAMES W. LOEWEN is a sociologist who spent two years at the Smithsonian Institution surveying twelve leading high school textbooks of American history only to find an embarrassing blend of bland optimism, blind nationalism, and plain misinformation, weighing in at an average of 888 pages and almost five pounds.

A best-selling author who wrote *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your High School History Textbook Got Wrong* and *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong.* (Touchstone, 1999)

An educator who attended Carleton College, holds the Ph.D. in sociology from Harvard University, and taught race relations for twenty years at the University of Vermont

PROFESSOR GARY NASH, UCLA was the past director of the National Center for History in the Schools. He was a prime mover in the battle for improving History Education and a founding member of the National Council for History Education.

Among many other books, you may find these of interest:

History on Trial: National Identity, Culture Wars, and the Teaching of the Past, (First Vintage Books, 2000)

Lessons From History: Essential Understandings and Historical Perspectives Students Should Acquire, (Natl Center for History June 1992)

DIANE RAVITCH IS Research Professor of Education at New York University. She holds the Brown Chair in Education Policy at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C., where she is a Visiting Senior Fellow and edits the Brookings Papers on Education Policy. Dr. Ravitch is on the Board of Trustees of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.

From 1991 to 1993, she was Assistant Secretary of Education and Counselor to Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander in the administration of President George H.W. Bush. She was responsible for the Office of Educational Research and Improvement in the U.S. Department of Education. As Assistant Secretary, she led the federal effort to promote the creation of state and national academic standards

See her books and more on: <http://www.dianeravitch.com/>

Her most recent and relevant book concerning the history crisis is: *The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn* Published by Random House. ISBN: 0-375-41482-7. <http://www.randomhouse.com/knopf/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780375414824>

RICHARD SHENKMAN IS the editor and founder of <http://www.HistoryNewsNetwork.org>, which features articles by historians on current events. He can be regularly seen on Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC. He is a New York Times best-selling author of five history books, including *Legends, Lies & Cherished Myths of American History*. His most recent book is *Presidential Ambition: How the Presidents Gained Power, Kept Power and Got Things Done*, which was published in 1999 by HarperCollins. Educated at Vassar and Harvard, Mr. Shenkman is an award-winning investigative reporter and the former managing editor of KIRO-TV, the CBS affiliate in Seattle. In 1997 he was the host, writer and producer of a prime time series for The Learning Channel inspired by his books on myths. He gives lectures at colleges around the country on several topics, including American myths and presidential politics. Mr. Shenkman can be reached by email at editor@historynewsnetwork.org or by phone at (206)228-4386

Appendix 6
Books and Articles for extended reading on the History Crisis

1. The new research that challenges the canon of the traditional story, which has been told without significant change in U.S. history textbooks since the late nineteenth century, has not been added easily. Two analyses of textbooks are particularly important: Francis Fitzgerald, *America Revised: History Schoolbooks in the Twentieth Century*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1979.; and James Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*. New York: The New Press, 1995.
2. A good review of the critique of traditional teaching methodologies can be found in Alfie Kohn, *The Schools Our Children Deserve*. Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999. especially pp. 209–234.
3. Peter Stearns, Peter Seixas and Sam Wineburg, *Knowing, Teaching & Learning History: National and International Perspectives*. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
4. Both the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the Bradley Commission on History in Schools advocate increasing the amount of history taught in secondary schools. Review of tabulations of NAEP's 1987 survey can be found in Diane Ravitch and Chester E. Finn Jr., *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?* New York: Harper & Row, 1987.; *Bradley Commission on History in Schools, Building a History Curriculum: Guidelines for Teaching History in Schools*. Washington, D.C.: Educational Excellence Network, 1988.
5. The National History Standards were revised in 1996 and can be ordered from the National Center for History in the Schools, University of California at Los Angeles, 1100 Glendon Ave., Ste. 927, Box 951588, Los Angeles, CA 90095.
6. National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1983. The full text is available at <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/title.html>.
7. A Nation at Risk <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/members.html>

Appendix 7

Further Resources

In an effort to help my readers, I have developed the website:
www.ilovehistoryonline.com

This website is a vast resource for teachers, students and lovers of history. The topics on this site include:

Collection of Resources, Primary and Secondary

Learning History and research Skills

Lesson Plans

General History and Skills

Meta-Lists of History related sites

United States History

Western Civilization

World History

Historical Fiction-Recommended Sites

Teach with Movies

Genealogy

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