

ILCHE Newsletter September 2013

Welcome Back Illinois History Educators!

Hopefully we are all ready to meet the challenges of a new year with a great deal of energy! Many of us have returned from seminars, have worked on grants, new curriculum projects, or have visited historical sites and museums.

Because you are all exemplary educators who always strive to be better teachers for your students, you have no doubt read many of the books that you did not have a chance to get to over the course of the last academic year. You have also had a chance to think about what went well last year and what could be improved. No doubt you have woken up with a solution or two to problems that bugged you last year, but could not find solutions for them. Isn't it amazing how sleep clarifies things!

If you are like me, and I know that you are, you began to have a harder time falling asleep about three weeks ago as something inside of you began whispering, "you need to begin gearing up for the new school year." Those close to you who are not teachers have been telling you that you seem to be somewhere else lately.

Of course, we know what that place is: in the classroom with your new students! Yes, most of us did not sleep before the first day of school because we were so excited to get back in the classroom, worried about the schedule on day one, hoping that we would get to all of the right places at the right times!

Once we put the first day behind us, however, everything seemed o.k. The sweaty palms began to disappear, our kids seem really bright and eager to please, you know, the honeymoon stage before the first test or paper is assigned and returned.

We are settling in and we are all in this together. The ILCHE Board wishes you a smooth start to the year!

2013 Goals

The ILCHE Board is excited about building on a great year last year. We have decided to focus on the following goals for the 2013-14 school year:

Increase membership

Continue to build the quality and attendance of for annual meeting at IMSA

Increase presence at the National Meeting

Provide Professional Development opportunities to underserved districts

Pursue grant opportunities and potential donors more aggressively

Experiment with creating single event lectures

Increase membership:

The national office is very concerned with increasing the membership within our state organizations. The NCHE Board plans to reduce membership fees and extend memberships to pre-service educators at a lower, discounted cost. You must process your membership through the national office at the national website. Our parent and state organizations have been overly dependent on funding coming from the Byrd Grants. Now that these grants are expiring and public money is drying up, we need to do a better job of sustaining our organization from within. We all need to encourage a colleague to join. The goal of the national organization is to double its size. If we each succeed in getting one colleague to join, we will double the size of the state organization.

Strengthen IMSA Conference

By all accounts, our conference last year was a huge success. We will work to produce an even better conference in partnership with IMSA. We hope to attract more teachers from downstate areas by getting to you information sooner and by finding ways to advertise from Galena to Metropolis, and from Zion to Cairo!

Increase Presence at the National Meeting

Only three teachers and two presenters from Illinois attended last year's conference. Our goal this year is that we will have five presenters and at least ten attendees from Illinois at the Albuquerque (March 20-22) conference:

<http://www.nche.net/conference>.

Professional Development Opportunities

Because so many districts in this state are underserved and in need of low cost quality History professional development, we hope to begin assisting districts around the state with an ILCHS speakers bureau. Our initial effort will be at the Thornwood ISD on September 11. Many thanks to Dean Pinos for organizing the presentations which will feature Dean, Clay Skinner, and Seamus Campion. Thanks as well to newly minted U.S. History PhD, Gene Tesdahl who will also make a presentation (he is looking for a job in the Chicago area, by the way). Let us know if you know of a district that needs PD assistance, or if you could volunteer for possible future events.

Pursue Grant Opportunities

Like every other organization we are hard pressed for the funding that we would like to acquire to be able to sponsor more professional development opportunities and provide expenses and honoraria for guest speakers.

Single Lecture Events

I am discussing the idea of creating a William H. McNeill Lecture in World History with the Dean of the University of Chicago, the University's History Chair, and the President of the American Historical Association. Hopefully we can work out a joint sponsorship and hold the inaugural lecture in Hyde Park later this year. If we can get this off the ground with fairly good attendance, perhaps a north suburban school could work with Northwestern to put on a similar lecture in the North suburbs. More on this as it develops.

The New American Amnesia: Lendol Calder's New Article

The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their own history.

Orwell

A lot of people I've been running into lately can't seem to remember important details about anything. I get stuck on spelling "the" sometimes and I reverse digits on my phone number a bunch. We all wonder why, even those of us under fifty and who haven't delivered kids, we seem to be losing our memories.

A recent study (was it released today?) revealed that 9% of Americans take sleeping pills to get to sleep. Somebody a few years ago (10? 20?) said that we had become a

Prozac nation, though I have heard (when?) that aluminum, not reading, and lack of exercise can also contribute to memory loss. And, of course, those sports that use the head as another appendage, football and soccer, do lots of damage, too.

But the sort of memory loss I want to talk about involves memory in the singular use. This kind of memory loss is the favorite subject of our nation's memory therapists otherwise known as historians. You know, those talking head guys on all of those PBS documentaries that are all narrated somehow by one guy, David McCullough.

Lots of historians foam at the mouth about this kind of memory loss: Russell Jacoby in his *Social Amnesia* (my personal favorite), Clive James in his *Cultural Amnesia*, and Christopher Lasch in his book about our national disease, *The Culture of Narcissism*.

In my humble opinion, though, I think we have finally found a memory therapist who has nailed the loss-of-memory problem. In an absolutely brilliant short article recently published in *The Organization of American Historian's, The Magazine of History*, Augustana History Professor Lendol Calder suggests that young people who enter his freshman history classes no longer bring with them any story of American History. Since most non-geeky non-history people will not read it, I'll try to serve the wider public with this all too short synopsis.

I know what you are thinking, what does he do, stimulate the dead history brain cells in some kind of Walker Percy like machine? (MRI?). His method is not that complicated, but even more ingenious, if there is such a thing anymore as low-tech genius.

Professor Calder quizzes every incoming freshman history student. Yes, on the first day of class! He requires them to write a 600-word narrative of American history before they do anything else. He has collected these narratives for nearly twenty years and has developed rubrics and categories to classify them. Most of these stories, it turns out, fall within four categories: 1) The Glory Story about America as the beacon and defender of World freedom 2) The Gory story of American genocide, racism, and imperialism that is the flip side of the Glory Story 3) The High Ideals story of a country that messes up a lot, but still strives to overcome its shortcomings, and 4) The Chaos story where there is simply no narrative, just big events that students can not place on a timeline; kind of like a Jackson Pollack fling-a-thon or a bunch of responses to Leno's "On the Street" history questions thrown together randomly, and 5) there are the responses that can't be categorized and its not worth going there, wherever there is (in some kind of cloud?).

You can probably guess where this is going. Calder says that between the Spring Term of 2000 and the Winter Term of 2011, the number of students who penned the Chaos Story rose from 28% to 72%. Sadly, Calder concludes that, "in a remarkably short time, the capacity to find any meaning at all in the past and articulate it in a coherent narrative seems to have evaporated."

Yes, I can hear the statisticians among you objecting: “but isn’t this a limited sample?” Yes, Professor Calder suggests that these are preliminary results based on a limited sample and he has enlisted professors from all over the country at differing kinds of colleges to use his model pre-assessment and categorization scheme. Strikingly, British researcher Denis Shemilt has reached remarkably similar conclusions, “Investigations into pupils’ constructs about the past...indicate not only that few British fifteen year olds develop useful and historical narrative frameworks but that, for many, the ‘event space’ within such narratives form and *grow incoherent* and lacking in order and meaning.”

This conclusion, of course, begs the important question we all need to answer, why this troubling loss of memory? Corporate education reformers could respond that this loss of memory represents is yet another failure of the American School system.

Calder would say, to the contrary, as Kenneth Bernstein did in a Washington Post blog posted by Valerie Strauss, that Corporate Reform and teaching to the test for exit exams and AP courses have so atomized our national historical narrative that it no longer exists. Because of the focus on memorizing the trees that standardized tests require, we have lost the idea of the forest.

Calder presciently argues that our national history is at a very important disintegration point: our memory is melting away into a rising ocean (sound familiar?) We need to teach “Big stories. We can’t afford to neglect storytelling when it is fundamental to human comprehension of the world. My blindness about this became apparent when studying stories students tell and don’t tell anymore. It is a disposition they have learned from their schooling and the zeitgeist [i.e. vacuous popular culture and digitalized information]. If I am right about this, then our work is cut out for us. If we do not put big stories at the center of history teaching, the past will be unaffected, but the future of history will be in doubt. Why would anyone value something they learned to regard as pointless?”

So, the moral of this story is that digitalized, atomized, passionless data collection that passes as education is probably killing our collective identity---our history. Storytelling is probably at least 50,000 years old and the most important form of knowing for humans for 49, 900 of those years. Have the standardizers lost our minds somewhere?

I can’t remember: Lendol, were you the guy in Austin with a long beard and ratty army jacket? I know we were in the same history class.

I do know and will not forget that you are an A+ teacher, the kind of teacher who is brilliant without confusing us all with big fancy words. I hope that education policy makers will take the time to listen to you!

Paul Horton

Common Core Concerns

The following opinion piece represents one perspective. I invite a Common Core Standards supporter to contribute an opinion piece for the next issue.

“Nothing that is capable of being memorized is history”

R.G. Collingwood

“History is an argument without end”

Peter Geyl

The End of History in Illinois?

As an historian, history teacher, and leader of Illinois history teachers, I am very heartened to observe this country’s love of history, most recently in all of the stories about the March on Washington that have made it into all forms of media. I hope that this interest is not short lived in the Land of Lincoln.

Our city and state are full of wonderful opportunities to learn about and experience history from amazing research libraries at the University of Chicago, Northwestern, and The Newberry, to top notch archives and museums like the Chicago History Center, the Field Museum, The Illinois Holocaust Museum (Skokie), the National Archives Midwestern branch (Chicago), and the state of the art Abraham Lincoln Museum and Archives in Springfield. The Illinois Bottom downstate is the site of the first major city on the North American continent, Cahokia, which dwarfed all but a handful of European cities in the late medieval period.

While we have a lot to be proud of as citizens of Illinois when it comes to teaching and learning about history, we face many obstacles in the present and in the near future.

Recent federal mandates adopted by the state (No Child Left Behind and The Race to the Top) that force all public schools in the state to teach to the Common Core Standards are a threat to History Education, and all Humanities related education

because administrators concerned about math and reading test scores will funnel scarce resources and time into preparing for more standardized tests.

History is learned best when students read grade level appropriate history books (not textbooks). Students need to use documents to construct analysis and practice a lot of writing. We must substantially increase the amount of reading and writing that students do to prepare them for college. Under the current regime that will assess literacy using Pearson Education produced multiple-choice tests, content knowledge does not matter. This sets up major problems in schools with substantial numbers of students enrolled in Honors and AP courses. These courses are content-dense, but administrators will now be forced to push skills at the expense of content. For seniors there is the additional problem of the requirement of content specific SAT's (SAT II's) for college admission. From my perspective as a thirty-year history educator, all of the pressures of the current "reforms" work against the teaching of exemplary history courses. It is one thing to require a basic skills emphasis for students who have difficulty developing basic skills in well served and underserved districts, it is quite another to strip courses of substantial content to accommodate the "one size fits all" approach to education required by the RTTT mandates.

I collect stories about history teaching as I meet teachers from all over my state. Many history teachers are very concerned about the Common Core Standards. One history teacher in a well-funded suburb tells me that the History Department in his school has become the Humanities Department because the district's superintendent wants to hire more English teachers to "teach to the Common Core." In other words, History will be "crowded out" to accommodate more Common Core writing exercises to get his district's scores up (remember, history is not tested; literacy skills are). Another History teacher tells me that since being asked to teach to the Common Core, he has had to give up thirty to forty percent of his content. Still another teacher has told me that he has been forced to drop a major research paper assignment because the Common Core does not require depth of content knowledge, and his administrators want close reading of short works of fiction and nonfiction all the time. In another case, teachers in a nearby CPS high school tell me that they have eliminated freshman World History because so much social studies time was taken away in grades K-8 drilling for nationally mandated tests, that most students failed history because they lacked any sense of context or chronology.

My college and university history education colleagues who train pre-service history teachers also tell me that they have been cut out of the history standards and curriculum consulting and writing processes by the State Board of Education once the board chose to adopt the Common Core curriculum. And history education professionals who are department chairs at some of the best schools in the state are also complaining about the institution of value added teacher assessments based on student performance. They say student learning is far too complicated to be assessed by multiple-choice tests or digitalized computer grading of essays.

The current President of the American Historical Association, Professor Kenneth Pomeranz, University Professor of Modern Chinese History at the University of Chicago, seems to share these concerns in a recent essay about how he was inspired by his very demanding and unpredictable seventh grade history teacher, Mr. Epstein who would ask provocative questions every day and demand well researched essay responses. Mr. Epstein taught Professor Pomeranz to think about history and do history. The lessons that Pomeranz learned from his teacher kept him thinking about historical issues well beyond an end of the year assessment that could not capture the complexity of a “mind on fire” with curiosity. The questions that Mr. Epstein asked shaped the mind of a great historian over the course of dozens of years. According to Pomeranz, “I have cited this example many times in explaining why I doubt that externally imposed assessment schemes will improve teaching.”

When one of the most accomplished and respected historians of the last twenty-five years who is charged with improving history education all over the country tells the Mr. Epstein story, we all need to listen. The Common Core Standards and the Race to the Top mandates will only discourage very bright young history teachers from teaching kids how to think about history. To keep history alive in Illinois, we too, as citizens of this great state, must demand teachers who will not conform to cookie cutter curricula and assessment. We are headed down this road now. We need to speak up now to preserve the integrity of history teaching in Illinois.

Source: <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2013/1304/Getting-Right-with-Mr.Epstein.cfm>

Personal interview with Professor Pomeranz, June 4th, 2013: “The essay was a way for me to make my point very tactfully. I see supporting the teaching of history as of my most important roles as President of AHA.”

Paul Horton

Beginning of the Year Lesson on the Daniels-Zinn Controversy in Indiana

This lesson (below) is not presented in Lesson Plan format because you all know what you are doing and you are great on improving on rough ideas to serve your students. This is one lesson of about twenty-five I have written this summer for NCHE on the nature of Historiography. The will be presented together at this year’s NCHE National Conference in Albuquerque.

The Study of History XIII: Recent Historical Controversies

In the mid 1990s the debate over the National History Standards produced by the Center for History in the Schools at UCLA and funded by the National Endowment of the Humanities created a big stir. The “History wars” raged on for years and sensitized many Americans to history curriculum issues.

The writers of the NEH American History and World History standards included many preeminent historians like Gary Nash and William H. McNeill. The standards were written with input from a representative and very experienced sampling of college and high school teachers and teachers from K-8 as well.

Once the standards were published, the NEH Director, Lynn Cheney, then Vanderbilt Education Professor Chester Finn, a legion of conservative critics and pundits, and many historians led a concerted; some would say vitriolic attack, on the standards. These conservative critics claimed that the standards denigrated the positive aspects of American history, especially by vastly reducing treatments of the benefits of entrepreneurship, innovation, and technology. They also claimed that “tenured radical” historians centered the standards on social history and “victimization narratives.” Conservative critics tended to support Historicism (the idea of completely objective history), the consensus history that was produced in the 50s before 60’s social history began to emphasize conflict, and textbooks that had been stringently reviewed by state textbook committees. After all, this has been the status quo since WWII they argued. Textbooks were reviewed for forty years by Mel and Norma Galber, a husband and wife team in Texas. The Gablers were very conservative and reviewed textbooks very carefully for any signs of atheism or left-wing bias. Because the number of textbooks that were sold in Texas was so great, textbook companies tended to use the approved Texas textbooks for the rest of the country in the 70s, 80s, and early 90s before printing developed to accommodate different textbooks for different states. So editing in Texas impacted the high school textbooks that were distributed to the entire country (see link below*).

The defense of the standards amounted to a defense of historical “revisionism.” Nash, fellow editor Charlotte Crabtree, and dozens of historians argued in dozens of opinion pieces that research on new topics and new aspects of history had uncovered new documents and perspectives that had to be integrated into the then current textbooks to reflect ongoing debates and emerging consensus on dozens of issues. From this perspective, most historians saw the attack on the national standards as politically motivated: a continuation of the 60’s “culture wars” that the right used as a political weapon.

Since the mid 1990s, this controversy tends to heat up around hot-button issues, especially in the states. State school board elections, especially in the South, have focused on state standards and curriculum, especially history standards and curricula that seek to develop critical thinking. Conservative groups tend to push for 50s consensus history that reduces the emphasis on learning about reform movements and their leaders. Conservatives also tend to support an emphasis on what is called the Whig idea of American history that combines the idea of American "Exceptionalism" with steady movement toward more democratic freedom tied to free-market capitalism. Most of these conservatives are also associated with church and business groups who claim that the Founding Fathers were devout Christians, that religion is central to American history, and that the idea of American "Exceptionalism" justifies the exportation of American freedom that legitimates an asserative foreign policy and heavy defense spending. They seek to defend a given state's history curricula from "creeping socialism, atheism, and political correctness." Attempts to teach critical thinking from this perspective all too often seek to undermine these values and must be combated. In a word, they want public school history to be patriotic history and thus project a very robust nationalism. Florida and Texas have banned critical thinking that undermines received democratic values from the above perspective.

A recent example of such a state hot-button issue is ex-Indiana Governor Mitch Daniel's concern about the use of Howard Zinn's, *The People's History of the United States* as a classroom source or text. Zinn was a historian, a Civil Rights leader, and an anti-Vietnam War protestor. His book unabashedly seeks to undermine consensus history by presenting a bottom-up perspective of American history that emphasizes class-conflict and race, class, and gender issues. His central theme in *The People's History* is, not surprisingly, that the very wealthy always find a way to control the mechanisms of political power in the United States.

*For more on the influence of the Gablers see:

Douglas Martin, "Norma Gabler, Leader of Crusade on Textbooks, Dies at 84," *New York Times*, August 1, 2007

http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/01/education/01gabler.html?_r=0

Assignment: Please read the discussion in the links (below) about this controversy and be prepared to discuss the following:

David J. Bobb, "Howard Zinn and the Art of Ant-Americanism, *Wall Street Journal*, August 12th, 2013:

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324769704579008453713889352.html>

Scott Jaschik, "Daniels vs. Zinn: Round II," *Inside Higher Ed*, July 18, 2013

<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/07/18/mitch-daniels-renews-criticism-howard-zinn>

David Masciotra, "Mitch Daniels should have been more open -minded about Howard Zinn's magnum opus," *IndyStar.com*, July 25, 2013

<http://www.indystar.com/article/20130724/OPINION03/307240090/Mitch-Daniels-should-been-more-open-minded-about-Howard-Zinn-s-magnum-opus>

Joseph A. Palermo, "Mitch Daniels, Howard Zinn, and the Politics of History," *Huffington Post*, July 30 2013

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joseph-a-palermo/mitch-daniels-howard-zinn_b_3677477.html

Rich Lowry, "Daniels vs. Zinn," *National Review Online*, July 30, 2013

<http://www.nationalreview.com/article/354691/daniels-vs-zinn-rich-lowry>

Daniel J Flynn, "The FBI History of Howard Zinn," *New York City Journal*, August 19, 2010

<http://www.city-journal.org/2010/eon0819df.html>

Quotes from Zinn's, *A People's History of the United States*:

<http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/2185591-a-people-s-history-of-the-united-states-1492-to-present>

1)What are Gov. Daniel's concerns, exactly?

2)What course of action does Gov. Daniels propose?

3)List and describe the arguments of those who defend Zinn.

4)Read the attached chapter from Zinn's, *The History of the American People*.

Indiana State School Board Simulation:

State Board Roles:

Research all points of view and research how state school boards work: all minutes have to be published, so google: "Indiana State School Board minutes."

#1 Person of Color: Moderate

#2 Middle Aged, Special Education Degree, Special Education Advocate

#3 Conservative ex-teacher with links to the Tea Party

#4 Retired University professor with chemistry degree

#5 Person of Color: Left-Leaning

#6 Former President of the City College System of Indianapolis, millionaire who has barely avoided several indictments due to political connections

#7 State Superintendent who favors the Common Core Curriculum, Standardized Testing, and school privatization

Roles in favor of banning Zinn from Indiana public school classrooms

Prepare a two-minute speech to deliver at the State School Board meeting for:

#1 Bill Korach from *The Report Card* (online History publication)

#2 Chester Finn of the Fordham Institute

#3 Lynne Cheney, former National Endowment for the Humanities Chairperson

#4 Michelle Malkin from *The National Review* magazine

#5 Concerned parent affiliated with the Tea Party

#6 Concerned parent and history teacher

#7 Concerned conservative historian

Roles against banning Zinn from Indiana public school classrooms

Prepare a two-minute speech at the Indiana State School Board meeting for:

#1 Matt Rothschild, editor of *The Progressive* magazine

#2 ACLU lawyer

#3 Professor Stephan Thelen, editor of *The Journal of American History*

#4 Professor Kenneth Pomeranz, University of Chicago, and President of the *American Historical Association*

#5 Concerned parent affiliated with Move-on

#6 Concerned parent affiliated with Occupy

#7 Liberal retired history teacher who used to use Zinn in his classroom

Following testimony and vote:

Prompt: You are a member of the Indiana State School Board. Write a one page single-spaced speech that explains your vote on this issue. Be prepared to deliver your speech.