LETTING TEACHERS SPEAK: THE NATIONAL HISTORY STANDARDS

PROJECT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

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LETTING TEACHERS SPEAK: THE NATIONAL HISTORY STANDARDS PROJECT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the National History Standards Project within the context of successive cycles of educational reform. It attempts to illustrate why and how the National History Standards were developed in the 1990s, placing the project within the context of standards-based educational reforms. Unlike previous examinations of the project, this thesis also allows teachers - those most affected by educational reforms - to speak about their understandings of and experiences with the National History Standards through the use of oral history evidence. Finally, this thesis attempts to connect the teachers and their experiences with the National History Standards to the current debate over state educational standards and high-stakes accountability measures.

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Turabian Style Guide

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CHAPTER 1

CYCLES OF REFORM IN THE AMERICAN CURRICULUM

The twentieth century witnessed a number of struggles over the content of the American school curriculum. Education professionals, reformers, textbook publishers, and national education boards and organizations as well as many others played significant roles in these struggles. Parents and concerned members of the American public also joined in the fray. The school curriculum serves as a place whereby a given society can define and transmit its values and beliefs from one generation to the next. Therefore, those in control of the curriculum theoretically wield much power. According to Christine Sleeter and Carl Grant, "Debates about curriculum content can be understood broadly as struggles for power to define the symbolic representation of the world and of society, that will be transmitted to the young, for the purpose of either gaining or holding onto power."[1] Other theorists like Michael W. Kirst and Michael W. Apple agree that control over knowledge and its transmission is at the center of the twentieth century struggles over the American curriculum.[2] More than simply reinforcing the existing

[1] Christine Sleeter and Carl A. Grant, "Race, Class, Gender and Disability in Current Textbooks," in *Politics of the Textbook*, eds. Michael W. Apple and Linda K. Christian-Smith (New York: Routledge, 1991), 281.

[2] Michael W. Kirst, *Who Controls Our Schools?: American Values in Conflict*, New York: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1984; Michael W. Apple, *Cultural Politics and Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996).

power relationships within the society, however, the curriculum itself has been used to challenge and redefine those power relationships. Linda Symcox summarized this nicely when she wrote,

> If we analyze the historical struggle over the curriculum, two competing themes emerge, waxing and waning with the tides of political change. Social control competes with social justice; individual rights compete with collective rights. At the heart of the curricular divide lies the question: Is the purpose of schooling to maximize individual potential, or should schools be an instrument of social reform? Are these two goals compatible? Since the answer to this fundamental question taps into our deepest beliefs about human potential and social responsibility in a democracy, the curriculum has, and always will be, contested terrain.[3]

As Symcox stated, public debates over the American curriculum, over what knowledge and whose knowledge is important enough to pass on to succeeding generations, has, and always will be, a part of the American educational system.

Educational historians, however, have identified a pattern – cyclical in nature – to the struggles and debates over the American curriculum. When the larger society undergoes extreme political, social, or economic change, debates over the curriculum seem to grow louder and more intense. For example, in the later nineteenth century, the United States was experiencing rapid industrialization, mass immigration, and an increased level of urbanization. Instead of teachers and schools simply mirroring the values and beliefs of the larger community, teachers and schools were seen as vehicles for socializing and "Americanizing" an increasingly diverse society. The Progressive

[3] Linda Symcox, *Whose History? The Struggle for National Standards in American Classrooms* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002), 11.

reform movement arose in part to meet these challenges and transform the school curriculum. Thus, reform movements usually arise in response to shifts in the political and social climate of the society. For instance, the 1930s and 1960s were liberal eras overwhelmingly concerned with child-centered curricula and educational equity, whereas the 1890s and 1950s were conservative eras focused on teaching students how to meet the economic and technological challenges then facing the nation.[4]

Educational historian Herbert Kliebard identified several forces that have shaped the American curriculum. According to Kliebard, these forces emerged early on in the history of American education and were in place by the early twentieth century. The first force was the traditionalists, or "humanists."[5] Led by men such as Charles W. Eliot, the president of Harvard University, and other members of the 1893 Committee of Ten, this group sought to preserve the heritage of Western culture in the face of rapid social change. They worked to, and largely succeeded in, establishing traditional academic subjects and college entrance requirements based on a classical, liberal education. Despite the social changes occurring around them, the traditionalists believed that progress depended on transmitting the classical, Western canon to successive generations. Furthermore, this group believed that this liberal education should be available to all students, not just the elite, and would therefore bind individuals of varying socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds together.

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[4] For more on the cycles of reform in American education, see Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[5] Ibid., 9.

The other three forces identified by Kliebard challenged the traditional education espoused by the humanists. The "child-study" movement was the second force identified by Kliebard.[6] Inspired by Jean Jacques Rousseau, the Progressive reformers of the child-study movement argued that curriculum design should mirror the stages through which children develop rather than be organized around broad disciplines. According to the child-study movement's leaders such as G. Stanley Hall and John Dewey, a child-centered curriculum and pedagogy would allow each child to live up to his or her potential and thereby lead to societal progress.

The third force identified by Kliebard was the "social efficiency educators," who were drawn to the scientific management techniques prominent in American business and industry in the early part of the twentieth century.[7] These reformers believed, that by applying scientific management techniques to the management of schools, students would be better prepared to meet the demands of a complex technologically-based society. They recommended a differentiated curriculum whereby students would be tracked by aptitude and ability, sorting students into academic and vocational tracks. Although they considered themselves to be Progressive reformers, their idea of progress was quite different from that of the child-study reformers.

The fourth and final force identified by Kliebard was the "social meliorist" movement, identified most closely with Lester Frank Ward.[8] In his 1882 book, *Dynamic Sociology*, Ward argued against the Social Darwinists and laissez-faire capitalists,

[6] Ibid., 37.

[7] Ibid., 77.

[8] Ibid., 158.

contending instead that humans could use their intelligence to create a new social order through the social institutions that they created.[9] Schools, according to the social meliorists, would be the most important factor in bringing about this new social order. Education was the key to social progress. Unlike the proponents of social efficiency, who saw business and similar enterprises as important to social progress, the social meliorists believed education was the starting point and ending point for social progress.

With the emergence of these four forces, a battle formed between those who believed the primary purpose of school was to reinforce the existing social order and those who believed schools should transform the social order. Each force in its essence believed that its reforms would benefit both the individual as well as society. The traditionalists, with their focus on academic disciplines centered on the canon of Western civilization, sought to preserve the traditional curriculum. Progressive reformers on the other hand argued that the traditional academic curriculum could not possibly respond to the demands of industrialization, social diversification, and urbanization. Throughout the twentieth century, the four forces struggled over control of the American curriculum as successive waves of reform ebbed and flowed. Depending on the economic, political, and social climate of any given time, one force might be more successful than the others. Success was, however, never permanent. As socioeconomic and political situations changed, another group would take the lead in curricular reform. According to Symcox,

> In the end, curricular change evolved piecemeal as American schools absorbed various aspects of successive reform movements. No reform was ever adopted in toto: rather, ideas were absorbed in myriad ways as schools

[9] Lester F. Ward, *Dynamic Sociology* (New York: D. Appleton, 1883).

> experimented with them. The result has been an educational tapestry woven of strands from these various reform movements.[10]

Furthermore, these reform movements exist within a complex educational infrastructure. In making policy, politicians at all levels of government must take into account their constituencies and special interest groups such as foundations, teachers' unions, and corporations. Some of these groups are more accountable to the public than others, resulting in outcomes that may or may not be beneficial to all.

In order to better understand how the forces identified by Kliebard have shaped the American curriculum throughout the twentieth century, it might be helpful to look at some specific examples. One example is that of David Saville Muzzey, a Columbia University professor of history. Muzzey was a Progressive, and he can probably be most clearly identified with the child-centered study movement of education reformers, although one also finds aspects of the social meliorist tradition in his work. He believed that the nation was in need of reform by the early 1900s due to the increasing levels of both industrialization and immigration. He openly criticized the social and economic inequality around him, but he also believed that America would rise to the occasion and right the wrongs of society. He wrote, "It is inconceivable that the great body of American citizens will long allow one tenth of their number to stagnate in abject poverty."[11] Muzzey was a product of his time, however, and his views on labor and race relations are not what one might think of as progressive today. Nevertheless, according

[10] Symcox, *Whose History?*, 15.

[11] David Saville Muzzey, *An American History* (New York: Ginn, 1911), 618.

to Kliebard, although [his work] includes its share of attitudes and pronouncements that could not, under any circumstances, pass muster today, it is quite progressive for its time in its interpretation of the American heritage."[12]

In 1911, Muzzey published a secondary school textbook entitled *An American History*. The book was enormously successful, going through several editions and selling millions. Although he relied on a traditional narrative prose, Muzzey incorporated the most recent scholarship in his work, which sometimes meant rethinking the traditional story of progress and consensus so prevalent in American history.[13] Although Muzzey's textbook enjoyed great success in the schools throughout the 1910s, the success did not last. World War I ended in 1918, and the United States emerged from the war to face a range of economic, demographic, and cultural changes. It was not long before critics cast a less favorable light on Muzzey's progressive text. Newspaper reporter Charles Grant Miller and patriotic organizations such as the American Legion and the Sons of the American Revolution attempted to convince school boards to drop Muzzey's text from their list of required reading. In his 1928 book, *The Poisoned Loving-Cup*, Miller charged Muzzey (as well as many other scholars) with "un-American" and "subversive" activities.[14] In an earlier publication he wrote, "the treason of today insidiously directs against the minds of our children the poison gas of alien propaganda to deaden patriotic

[12] Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American* Curriculum, 243.

[13] Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Alfred E. Knopf, 1997), 27.

[14] Charles Grant Miller, *The Poisoned Loving-Cup: United States School Histories Falsified through Pro-British Propaganda in the Sweet Name of Amity* (National Historical Society, 1928), viii.

spirit and stupefy the national soul into unthinking submission to unknown imperialistic designs."[15]

Although organizations like the American Historical Association (AHA) came to Muzzey's defense, Miller's criticisms hit their mark. Fewer schools adopted Muzzey's text in the following years, and some communities even passed vaguely worded laws prohibiting the use of textbooks that spoke critically of America and the Founding Fathers.[16] Eventually, the agitation over Muzzey's textbook died down as the economic boom of the 1920s wore on. Yet this would not be the only time in which school textbooks and their authors were taken to task for questioning the traditional history curriculum.

Another similar example from the 1920s and 1930s that illustrates those forces identified by Kliebard is that of Harold Rugg and the social reconstructionists. Part of the social meliorist tradition, the social reconstructionists believed that the fundamental purpose of education was to use the curriculum to address social and economic problems. Schools were the place, they maintained, to examine such problems and begin the difficult process of finding solutions to those problems. At the vanguard of the social reconstructionist movement was Harold Rugg, an associate professor of education at Teachers College, Columbia. Rugg and his colleagues such as George Counts argued that the social studies curriculum (including history education) needed to be thoroughly reformed. They wanted to replace the pedagogy of memorization, harsh discipline, and

[15] Charles Grant Miller, *Treason to American Tradition: The Spirit of Benedict Arnold Reincarnated in United States History Revised in Textbooks* (California: Sons of the Revolution, 1922), 4.

[16] Bessie Louise Pierce describes one such law passed by the Oregon legislature in her book *Public Opinion and the Teaching of History in the United States* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1926), 18.

passive learning with flexible and functional social education.[17] Rugg argued that the current curriculum was biased toward "academic formulae, child interests, or the scientific study of society."[18] Furthermore, he and his colleagues contended that the curriculum was not relevant to society and its problems. In other words, Rugg believed the curriculum should be "socially worthy" of study.[19]

In 1922, Rugg produced a series of texts for both elementary and secondary schools in a series entitled *Man and His Changing Society*, which consisted of twenty volumes, each examining a different societal issue or problem.[20] In the series, Rugg introduced some of the latest social and economic research then available. His books stressed the need for students to develop analytical reasoning and reflective thought. He argued that "pupils must learn to think critically about modern problems," and he was one of the first textbook authors to put forth open-ended questions, questions that lacked a simple right or wrong answer.[21] Rugg's textbooks also criticized certain aspects of American society such as rampant competition and materialism, which he believed resulted from unchecked industrialization and laissez-faire economics. Despite his rather unorthodox approach, Rugg's *Man and His Changing Society* had sold over one million copies by the late 1930s. The warm response to Rugg's textbooks was most likely a

[17] Symcox, *Whose History*, 17.

[18] National Society for the Study of Education, *The Twenty-Sixth Yearbook* (Bloomington, IL: Public School Publishing Company, 1926), xi.

[19] Harold Rugg, "Needed Changes in the Committee Procedure of Reconstructing the Social Studies," *The Elementary School Journal* (1921) : 697.

[20] Harold Rugg, *Man and His Changing Society*

[21] Harold Rugg, *That Men May Understand: An American in the Long Armistice* (New York: Doubleday, 1941), 136.

direct result of the times in which he was writing. After the 1929 stock market crash and the resulting depression, Americans no longer unquestioningly accepted the capitalist system and they sought new ways to manage society's problems. Rugg's questioning and critical approach to education was therefore more easily accepted and adopted by the American public and education system. Just as Kliebard contends, however, as the political and social climate changed, the public's acceptance of Rugg's educational philosophy also changed.

By 1939, social reconstructionism was on its way out with the threat of the approaching war. Criticism of American society could no longer be accepted. In 1940, Rugg and his textbooks, which had been widely popular for over a decade, came under attack and were pulled from the shelves. Critics accused Rugg of writing unpatriotic and anti-American textbooks citing, among other things, his questioning of the American system of private ownership and capitalism and his criticizing of some of America's greatest heroes. According to Gary Nash and his colleagues, "Rugg's critics had deep suspicions of critical thinking and tended to equate open inquiry with cynicism and deficient loyalty."[22] In 1942, the American Committee for Democracy and Intellectual Freedom published a booklet defending Rugg's writings.[23] While the booklet enabled Rugg to continue his career in education, his books no longer enjoyed the success that they had previously. After the war, most textbooks reverted to factual narratives that spoke to a new era of education reform, one in which social efficiency and scientific

[22] Nash, Crabtree, and Dunn, *History on Trial*, 45.

[23] George H. Sabine and others, *The Textbooks of Harold Rugg* (American Committee for Democracy and Intellectual Freedom, 1942).

management superseded social meliorism and social reconstruction. This new era of education reform would last for nearly two decades, from the beginning of the 1940s through the end of the 1950s.

Thus we see in the example of Harold Rugg and the social reconstructionists a good example of Kliebard's forces at work. Rugg and the reconstructionists were able to take hold of the public's imagination at a time of political, economic, and social upheaval. Their reforms drew widespread support but only for a time. Once the political and social climate had changed, Rugg's education reforms were no longer accepted. A new force emerged on top. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the traditionalists who supported a consensus history would be the dominant force affecting educational policy.

One final example of Kleibard's forces at work can be seen in the education reforms of the 1960s and 1970s. With the launching of the Soviet satellite *Sputnik* in 1957, a growing fear emerged that the United States had lost its scientific and technological lead in the world. This provoked a substantial response from the federal government in the educational arena. The traditional, back-to-basics curriculum of the 1940s and 1950s was superceded in favor of a more innovative curriculum that would give the United States an edge over its competitors in the world economy and international politics. Within this more expansive economic and political climate, various new history and social studies curriculum projects emerged. One such effort at progressive curricular reform in history and the social studies was *Man: A Course of Study* (MACOS), which was funded by the National Science Foundation and led by Harvard educationist Peter Dow. Aimed at the middle grades, MACOS drew from a

variety of the social sciences including history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, geography, and economics. The multidisciplinary course asked students to ponder the question, "What is human about human beings?" Using an inquiry-based approach in which students constructed their own learning under the guiding framework of the teacher, students examined the Netsilik Eskimo culture, comparing and contrasting it with other cultures of the world as well as their own to answer the question posed to them.

At first, the course was well received by professional scholars and classroom teachers alike. By 1974, a total of 328,000 students in 1,728 schools in 47 states were using MACOS as part of their overall social studies curriculum.[24] One year later, however, MACOS was at the center of a fierce storm between the conservatives and traditionalists on one side and the progressive educators of the day on the other side. Criticisms came from groups such as the Heritage Foundation and the Council for Basic Education, which charged MACOS with undermining the "American Way." Parents in several states began to write letters to local and national newspapers, voicing their displeasure with MACOS and demanding schools to cease using the curricular materials. As mentioned above, the MACOS project was underwritten by federal funding, which only added fuel to the controversy. Congressman John B. Conlan of Arizona weighed in on the argument, stating, "thousands of parents across America view MACOS as a dangerous assault on cherished values and attitudes concerning morals, social behavior,

[24] Schaffarzick and Sykes, *Value Conflicts and Curriculum Issues: Lesson from Research and Experience* (Berkeley, CA: McCutchan Publishing Corporation, 1979), 9.

religion, and our unique American economic and political lifestyle."[25] Furthermore, Conlan called for an end to the federal funding of curricular materials like MACOS. Subsequently, sales of the program fell much like sales of Muzzey's and Rugg's textbooks fell after critics charged them both with unpatriotic leanings. By the end of the 1970s, MACOS was no longer a part of the social studies curriculum.

Again, one need only look at the economic, political, and social climate of the times to understand the rise and fall of the MACOS project. In the late 1950s with the increasing tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States, the American government and public was willing to entertain new and inventive curricular content and pedagogical methods if it meant gaining an edge over their international competitors. Furthermore, internal struggles such as the civil rights movement and the seemingly increasing disparity between the rich and the poor meant Americans were looking for answers to the social and political problems they witnessed on a daily basis. Ronald Evans summarized it nicely when he wrote,

> The overall pattern of the era…seemed largely a replay of what had occurred during the Progressive Era: experimentation and development followed by attacks on teacher freedom and defensive statements from NCSS [National Council on the Social Studies] and various social studies spokespersons. Boom and bust, innovation and reaction, had become a now familiar cycle to many in the social studies profession.[26]

[25] Conlan as quoted in Ronald W. Evans, *The Social Studies Wars: What Should We Teach the Children* (Columbia: Teachers College Press, 2004), 142.

[26] Evans, *The Social Studies* Wars, 144.

As the 1970s wore on, however, the climate changed and so too did Americans' tolerance for experimental educational reforms. A new conservative cycle of reform emerged during the late 1970s and 1980s, focusing once again on a back-to-basics curriculum.

In conclusion, the twentieth century witnessed a series of struggles over the American curriculum. Both "traditional" and "progressive" forces joined in the debates, and depending on the political, social, and economic climate of the times, some forces were more influential than others. Reform of the American curriculum is cyclical in nature, however. Although the traditional forces were strongest in the 1890s and 1950s, progressive forces carried the day throughout the 1930s and 1960s. This cycle of traditional and conservative education reform forces followed by more liberal and progressive reformers continued through the 1980s and 1990s, which is the subject of the following chapters.

CHAPTER 2

A CONSERVATIVE CYCLE OF REFORM, 1981-PRESENT

Beginning with Ronald Reagan's presidency and continuing through the administrations of his successors, the emphasis on pursuing equity in education shifted to an emphasis on pursuing excellence in education.[27] While there were major differences between the most recent Republican and Democratic occupants of the White House, when it came to federal educational policy specifically, there was more continuity than discontinuity. This continuity was the result of the agenda for educational policies set by President Reagan.

Ronald Reagan succeeded in winning the White House based on a platform that emphasized a reversal of many of the policies enacted by his predecessor, Jimmy Carter. Reagan promised success and victory when many people in the country believed Carter and previous presidents such as Nixon and Ford had offered only embarrassment and failure. Reagan's overall campaign was built on his doctrine of "New Federalism," which essentially meant strengthening corporate America by removing government regulations, privatizing public services, and devolving power to the states. His policies

[27] Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the educational arena focused on equalizing educational opportunities for the poor and minorities, as characterized by the movement for school desegregation and initiation of such programs as Head Start.

found favor with a receptive American public after a decade characterized by the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal, oil crises, and rampant inflation and unemployment. After a landslide victory in the 1980 election, Reagan quickly moved to cut taxes and increase military spending, thus leaving little for domestic programs such as public education. Although Reagan hoped to reduce or eliminate a range of social support programs from the federal budget, he met with only limited success.

Even before his election, Reagan maintained that his administration would not increase support for public education. Rather, the educational policy he espoused in the 1980 election consisted of the following three changes: (1) the abolition of the federal Department of Education,[28] (2) tax credits for private school tuition, and (3) returning prayer to public schools. With the addition of one or two of his own educational goals, George H. W. Bush pursued these same objectives after succeeding Reagan as president. Although Reagan attempted avoid dealing with matters relating to educational policy, he was unable to do so for very long. This was due in large part to his political appointments. Reagan appointees who shared his conservative ideology held key positions in the National Endowment for the Humanities and the U.S. Department of Education, and many of these appointees used their posts to promote teaching traditional values in the schools, thus keeping the spotlight on education.

While Reagan stated publicly his wish to abolish the Department of Education, he chose as secretary of education Terrell Bell, a man who proved unwilling to carry out

[28] The Department of Education was created in 1979 by President Jimmy Carter. Carter received substantial support from the National Education Association in the 1976 election. In return, he pledged to work for the establishment of a Cabinet-level Department of Education.

much of President Reagan's conservative agenda. Bell, a former commissioner of the U.S. Office of Education, was a member of the nation's educational establishment and testified in favor of the proposed federal Department of Education in the late 1970s. Although Bell and Reagan agreed to work on downgrading the federal educational agency to sub-Cabinet status, Bell argued that it must continue to function as a separate agency outside of the Department of Health and Welfare so that educational concerns were not diluted or diverted.[29]

During Bell's nearly four years as secretary of education, he often clashed with Reagan's conservative advisors, many of which were openly anti-public education. Yet Bell managed to maintain a positive relationship with the president and succeeded in maintaining cabinet status for his department. Despite this success, however, Bell was unable to combat the federal funding cuts for education, which continued under Reagan's successor George H. W. Bush. According to education historians Wayne J. Urban and Jennings L. Wagoner Jr., "the net effect of the Reagan-Bush period was a substantial diminution of almost every aspect of federal financial support for education, and, if not an overt disdain, an obvious lack of support for public education."[30] In fact, by 1984 the U.S. Department's of Education's share of elementary and secondary school expenditures dipped to its lowest level in twenty years, according to Richard Jung and Michael Kirst.[31]

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[29] For a full account of Bell's years as secretary of education, see Terrell Bell, *The Thirteenth Man: A Reagan Cabinet Memoir* (Free Press: New York, 1988).

[30] Wayne J. Urban and Jennings L Wagoner, *American Education: A History, 3rd Ed.* (McGraw Hill: Boston, 2004).

[31] Richard Jung and Michael Kirst, "Beyond Mutual Adaptation, into the Bully Pulpit: Recent Research on the Federal Role in Education," *Education Administration Quarterly*, 22, 3 (Summer 1986): 80-109.

Eventually, Bell's arguments with Reagan's advisors over the federal government's role in education became too much for the White House, and he resigned under some pressure from the administration but not before leaving his mark on federal educational policy. On assuming his post as Secretary of Education, Bell searched for an agenda that would promote high visibility for his department at minimal financial cost. Therefore, he pursued one of his longstanding concerns: an alarming decline in educational standards and achievement. Shortly after taking office in 1981, Bell appointed a commission to investigate this perceived decline. Headed by David Gardner, the National Commission on Excellence in Education consisted of individuals representing a variety of educational constituencies, from parents and teachers to school boards and college administrators.

For two years, the commission gathered data, held public hearings, and debated the causes and consequences of educational decline. In April 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education published a report of its findings and conclusions. Entitled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, the report claimed that there was a crisis in American education, and that finding a solution to that crisis was the most important educational objective facing the nation.[32] The media, almost immediately, picked up on the issue and began focusing public attention on Bell's concerns for educational excellence.[33] The report was quoted on the front pages of the nation's leading newspapers and magazines. About two weeks after the report was made

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[32] National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1983).

[33] On the origin of the report and the initial reaction to it, see Bell, *The Thirteenth Man*, 114-144.

public, *Newsweek* ran a story entitled "Can the Schools be Saved?," contending that "progress from one generation to the next…has been nearly shattered."[34] Bell himself held twelve regional conferences throughout the year to disseminate the report's findings. Even President Reagan appeared at town hall meetings, adopting the report's message that the nation was "at-risk."

Despite its sensationalism with regards to focusing on the United States as a competitor in the new world economy,[35] *A Nation at Risk* raised real concerns for many political, education, and business leaders. Behind the sensationalism lay seemingly real hard facts – declining test scores, fewer academic requirements, and less rigorous school curricula. Journalists, politicians, and educators responded favorably to these and other aspects of the report's findings. In fact, as early as the mid-1970s, some within the educational community had already begun to identify the same problems outlined in the report.[36] Furthermore, the American public proved more than receptive to the message of the report, which provided a reason for the nation's perceived educational decline and a starting point for reversing that decline. If schools were too blame for the decline, then the answer was simple: reform the schools.

Yet even with such support, there were others within and outside the educational arena skeptical of *A Nation at Risk*. They saw the report as simply another example of

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[34] Dennis A. Williams, "Can the Schools Be Saved?," *Newsweek*, 9 May 1983, 50-58.

[35] For many critics and supporters alike, this emphasis on the place of the United States in a competitive world mirrored the educational controversy begun with the launching of Sputnik in 1959.

[36] See Diane Ravitch, *The Schools We Deserve*, (Basic Books, 1985). The book consists of a series of essays, some dating back to the mid-1970s, in which educational excellence advocates identify many of the same problems pointed to by the excellence commission.

public school bashing, an attempt by the administration to blame the public sector and promote private enterprise. According to these educators, schools served as an easy target for explaining the nation's economic and social decline but were in fact the victims of the larger economic and social environment. Thus, it became a question of the chicken or the egg; which came first socio-economic decline or educational decline?

In answer to *A Nation at Risk*, two educational researchers, David Berliner and Bruce J. Biddle, published *The Manufactured Crisis*, the very title indicating that the two experts wondered if in fact *A Nation at Risk* was based on actual truths or outright lies.[37] Berliner and Biddle blasted both the Reagan and Bush administrations for effectively abandoning federal support for public education. Furthermore, they argued that despite this abandonment the nation's schools were doing a remarkable job in a difficult socio-economic environment. Others such as Theodore Sizer, Ernest Boyer, and John Goodland voiced similar arguments in their books *Horace's Compromise*, *High School*, and *A Place Called School*, respectively, all published in 1983.[38] Despite their criticisms of *A Nation at Risk*, however, experts like Sizer and Boyer did have criticisms of the schools as well and did not see education in quite the same positive terms as Berliner and Biddle.

Unlike Berliner and Biddle, and further unlike Bell, some educators attempted to find a middle ground to *A Nation at Risk* through critical evaluation of arguments both in

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[37] David C. Berliner and Bruce J. Biddle, *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America's Public Schools* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 1995).

[38] Theodore Sizer, *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983); Ernest Boyer, *High School*, (1983); John Goodland, *A Place Called School*, (1983).

support of and opposition to the report. These educators acknowledged that test scores had declined but pointed to a greater school-age population taking such tests, including a larger cohort of lower achievers. According to these critics, the report's proposed solutions of more testing and a back-to-basics curriculum ignored the very real demographic and economic shifts taking place in America's schools.[39]

Unlike the education reforms following the launching of *Sputnik*, which were targeted primarily although not exclusively at science and mathematics, the education reforms following the publication of *A Nation at Risk* focused on the humanities as well as science and math. The humanities, which included history and social studies education, became one of the most highly publicized and highly controversial parts of the whole reform movement to follow the report. Conservative scholars and policymakers such as Diane Ravitch and Chester Finn argued in a number of books, articles, and policy statements that students were no longer familiar with the nation's history or the great literary canon of Western civilization. In the classic book, *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?*, Ravitch and Finn analyzed the National Assessment of Educational Progress test scores, offering statistical evidence of this crisis in the humanities.[40] According to the authors, the average student taking the test answered only 54.5% of the questions correctly. Like *A Nation at Risk*, the book grabbed the public's attention, although critics argued that these statistics alone did not, in and of themselves, mean there was a crisis in

[39] During the 1970s, the school-age population broadened to include a much larger proportion of lower achieving students. The school-age population also consisted of an increasingly culturally diverse group of students with substantially different learning styles.

[40] Diane Ravitch and Chester E. Finn, *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?: A Report on the First National Assessment of History and Literature* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987).

humanities education. Nevertheless, the work of Ravitch, Finn, and other conservative scholars proved to be the basis for the subsequent standards movement of the 1990s.

The move towards excellence in education gained considerable support in the higher academic community as well, as evidenced by the cultural literacy movement. In 1987, E. D. Hirsch, Jr. published *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, in which he voiced discontent with the content of public schooling and attempted to prescribe a solution for the problem.[41] According to Hirsch, American education had been in a slow decline ever since "progressive educators" like John Dewey with their emphasis on child-centered teaching and learning began to hold sway over educational thought and practice in the early twentieth century. Although this indictment of progressive education was not new, Hirsch managed to grab the public's attention with his list of 5,000 terms that every literate American should know.[42] In other words, according to Hirsch and his supporters, there was (or needed to be) agreement on and implementation of a common body of shared knowledge. As Hirsch stated,

> Literate culture is the most democratic culture in our land: it excludes nobody; it cuts across generations and social groups and classes; it is not usually one's first culture, but it should be everyone's second existing as it does beyond the narrow spheres of family, neighborhood, and region.[43]

[41] Hirsch, E. D., *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Houghton Mifflin Co.: Boston, 1987).

[42] Two of Hirsch's colleagues, historian Joseph Kett and physicist James Trifel, contributed to the compilation of the 5,000-item list. The following year, the three men published *The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin , 1988).

[43] Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy*, 19.

Only understanding of this shared knowledge – cultural literacy – could the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged be closed.

Of course, Hirsch's promotion of a universal cultural literacy met with its share of controversy. Critics pointed out that knowledge was constantly changing and that what was important to one culture or sub-culture was not necessarily meaningful to another. Despite such criticism, however, hundreds of schools throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s began to adopt core curriculum materials, suggesting that many in education at least partially believed in the idea of a "core knowledge."

When George H. W. Bush campaigned for the presidency in 1988, he rode the wave of educational reform that *A Nation at Risk* had set into motion. Claiming to be "an education president," Bush promised to make Reagan's main educational proposals into law. Despite such rhetoric, however, Bush's education policies differed little from those of his predecessor. School prayer and tax credits for private school tuition remained on the agenda, while under Bush the presidential war against the Department of Education diminished substantially. Bush also intensified the campaign for school choice begun under Reagan's administration.

There was one notable difference between Reagan and Bush when it came to their education policies however. Unlike Reagan, Bush maintained a close-knit relationship with the nation's governors regarding issues of education, and eventually Bush and the governors developed an educational platform for the nation. In late September 1989 the president and the nation's governors convened the "Presidential Summit on Education." For two days, the president and the governors discussed the educational problems facing

the country and developed the *America 2000* program.[44] The program consisted of a series of goals, which the leaders agreed constituted an educational agenda for the nation.

Overall, the program, published as a pamphlet, largely restated some common educational themes: the schools were in need of reform and educators were accountable for their results. The development of the themes and goals associated with the Bush administration were certainly, although not exclusively, influenced by *A Nation at Risk* as well as the reports critics. The goals, all to be reached by the year 2000, were as follows:

1. All children in America will start school ready to learn.
2. The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.
3. American students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography; and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so that they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy.
4. U.S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.
5. Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

[44] *America 2000: An Education Strategy Sourcebook.* U.S. Department of Education: Washington, DC, 1991.

6. Every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.

Yet at the core of the program was a controversial idea – the need for national standards as the key aspect of educational reform. The very idea of "national" standards stood out against the whole of the history of American education, a history in which schools were locally controlled. To combat those on the Right and the Left who argued against such a federal intrusion into the schools, Bush made the standards voluntary, not mandatory. But as Urban and Wagoner point out, "what Bush did not address was how a national standard that sought effective universal application through voluntary adoption differed in practice from a mandatory standard."[45]

Despite such flaws in the program, however, politicians such as Arkansas governor Bill Clinton embraced the plan. In fact, Clinton helped convene the conference and was a leader in the movement to adopt *America 2000*. It is little wonder then that, after defeating Bush in the 1992 presidential election, Clinton proceeded to build on *America 2000* by developing his own program, *Goals 2000*. *Goals 2000* differed little from its predecessor, simply adding two new goals. It advocated parental involvement in education, and it established programs for improving the professional education of teachers.

Regardless of the change in administrations, educational improvement efforts remained largely unchanged from the 1980s to the 1990s. Bush, Clinton, and the "education governors" shared a liking for stated educational goals, standardized testing,

[45] Urban and Wagoner, *American Education*, 2004.

and accountability standards for schools and school districts. While the public criticism of schools and school people so prevalent during the Reagan and Bush administrations diminished under Clinton "the fundamental orientation of the Reagan-Bush years – an emphasis on school reform led by politicians along with a lack of infusion of meaningful amounts of federal funds for education – continued."[46]

Like Clinton before him, President George W. Bush came to the White House in 2000 as a former "education governor." As governor of the state of Texas, Bush imposed an accountability system on that state's schools that used standardized testing to measure school improvement. Although using standardized testing as the measure of accountability for schools remained controversial among professional educators, it clearly carried the day among politicians at both the national and state levels. Thus, many saw Bush's reforms in Texas as the way for the entire nation to follow.

In 2001, Bush used the regular renewal of a federal education law, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, to change national educational policy. Bush's version of ESEA became known as the "No Child Left Behind" act. While this act continued the previous patterns of federal provision and funding, it also institutionalized standardized testing. The act mandated testing in all public schools that received federal funds and imposed negative consequences on those schools that did not measure up. Parents of children in schools that received failing scores in two consecutive years were entitled to tutoring for their children or the option of enrolling in another, more successful, public school.

[46] Urban and Wagoner, *American Education*, 2004, 364.

Despite controversy, the Bush agenda dominated as federal mandates were implemented in the states. The net effect of all these national education reforms from the Reagan administration to the current Bush administration was an imposition of more regulations at the state and local levels than many officials ever contemplated. Conservative forces were in full control of the nation's education agenda, and it was these traditionalists that provided the initial impetus for the standards movement, including the National History Standards Project. This project is the subject of the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL HISTORY STANDARDS PROJECT

In September 1989, President H. W. Bush and the nation's governors met in Charlottesville, Virginia to attend an education summit with the ultimate goal of finding solutions to the perceived national educational crisis articulated in reports and studies such as *A Nation at Risk*. In their report, the President and the governors stated, "the time has come to establish clear national performance goals, goals that will make us internationally competitive [and] second to none in the twenty-first century."[47] At the summit, the governors worked out a series of education goals that would serve as benchmarks for the nation in its quest for educational reform. In a country that had historically deferred to state and local control of education, the idea of a *national* effort to reform education was important news.

President Bush announced six National Educational Goals in his 1990 State of the Union Address.[48] Jointly developed with the nation's governors, these goals ultimately set in motion the development of internationally competitive educational standards as a

[47] U.S. Department of Education, *National Goals for Education* (U.S. Department of Education, 1990), 1.

[48] Ibid.

national policy. According to those working on the project, the goals were not intended to mandate or force a national curriculum upon the states and local districts but to serve as a starting point for educational change at the federal, state, and local levels. The goals were intended to prevent the United States from seemingly losing ground in the global race for economic and technological leadership. As such, Goal 3 was one of the most important goals in the report, identifying the need for national achievement standards in five core school subjects, including history. Goal 3 stated that by the year 2000, "American students will leave grades four, eight, and twelve having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography."[49]

Over the next two years, the Bush administration moved the National Goals program forward with an impressive amount of bipartisan political and public support.[50] Key leadership came from Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander, Assistant Secretary of Education Diane Ravitch, and National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Chairman Lynne Cheney. In 1990, the National Education Goals Panel, which included a group of governors and Bush officials, was created to oversee and report on progress toward the National Education Goals. In 1991, Congress passed Bush's America 2000

[49] Ibid., 5.

[50] Gallup Polls in the late 1980s and 1990s revealed that support for national achievement standards, a standardized national curriculum, and national testing programs was growing among the public despite traditions of local control. See Stanley M. Elam and Alec M. Gallup, "The 21st Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools," *Phi Delta Kappan* 71, no. 1 (Sept. 1989): 41-56. Also see Stanley M. Elam and Alec M. Gallup, "The 23rd Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools," *Phi Delta Kappan* 73, no. 1 (Sept. 1991): 41-57.

Act[51], and in June 1991 the National Council on Education Standards and Testing (NCEST) was established by Congress to review the issue of education standards. NCEST issued a report on January 24, 1992, endorsing national education standards and contending that "in the absence of well-defined and demanding Standards, education in the United States has gravitated toward de facto national minimum expectations…Consumers of education in this country have to settle for far less than they should and for far less than their counterparts in other developed countries."[52] Later, Congress would continue support for national standards by passing President Clinton's Goals 2000: Educate America Act in 1994.[53]

Thus, by the spring of 1992, Congress and NCEST had joined the nation's governors and the Bush administration in supporting national standards in five core disciplines, including history. Task forces quickly began to develop standards in all five core disciplines such as mathematics, science, and literature. While there was some debate over standards in almost every discipline, standards in history proved to be something different. They proved to be much more controversial and contestable than standards in other disciplines. While it is unclear why this was so, it may have something to do with the nature of the subject of history itself. As chronicled earlier, history has

[51] The America 2000 Act was a long-range plan to move America towards the National Education Goals. The plan recommended the development of "world class" standards and voluntary national achievement tests to assess progress.

[52] National Council on Education Standards and Testing, *Raising Standards for American Education, A Report to Congress, the Secretary of Education, the National Education Goals Panel, and the American People* (Washington: D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992): i.

[53] Goals 2000: Educate America Act was essentially a continuation of Bush's America 2000 Act. Goals 2000 established a framework by which to identify world-class academic standards and measure student progress towards meeting those standards.

always been contested terrain. David Lowenthal has maintained that a tension exists between those who would have American students learn history and those who would have students learn heritage. Added to that, the discipline of history was itself fractured in the 1960s and 1970s, with a split developing between those wedded to traditional political and economic history and those moving towards social and cultural history. The wars over the school history curriculum and history standards mirrored to a large extent the cultural wars taking place in the larger society as well. Whatever the causes, the National History Standards proved more controversial than standards in any other discipline.

NCEST appointed a History Task Force to begin the difficult process of developing National Standards for History. Chaired by Lynne Cheney, the History Task Force included Charlotte Crabtree, then director of the National Center for History in the Schools (NCHS), a Cooperative Research Program of UCLA and the NEH. At the first meeting in October 1991, the History Task Force began to deliberate about the nature of the history standards. The task force recommended that the standards should address both U.S. and world history and should include interpretation and analysis, not just basic facts. The task force also insisted that the writing of the standards should be an inclusive process in which teachers, professional associations, and the public took part.[54] Two months later, on December 16, 1991, Secretary of Education Alexander and Chairman Cheney announced a $1.6 million dollar award to the NCHS to develop national standards in history, officially launching the National History Standards Project.

[54] History Task Force of the National Council for Education Standards and Testing, "Report of the History Task Force," in *Raising Standards for American Education*, K1-3.

With funding from the NEH and the United States Department of Education, the NCHS set to work developing comprehensive standards for American and world history. The first and perhaps most crucial task of the standards project was to develop an organizational structure to the NHSP. At the top of the NHSP organizational structure was the National Council. Charlotte Crabtree and Gary Nash from the NCHS served as co-chairs of the Council and thought the group should "represent a wide range of interests and perspectives among scholars, teachers, and advocates of history education, but not a microcosm of American cultural politics from the far Right to the extreme Left."[55] Following some negotiation, Lynne Cheney, Diane Ravitch, and the project's co-chairs agreed upon the names of twenty-eight individuals that included K-12 history teachers, school and district administrators, and academic historians as well as two members of NCEST and project officers appointed by the two funding agencies. The NHSP organizational structure also included a National Forum, which consisted of representatives from twenty-four major education, parent-teacher, and public interest associations. This body provided essential access to the wider public. In addition, nine focus groups, chosen by the leaders of the major educational organizations, provided review and consulting services. Finally, the NHSP formed three curriculum task forces, totaling more than fifty members, to draft the standards for grades K-4 and for grades 5-12 in U.S. and world history. These task forces included veteran teachers from all over the country as well as academic historians. Thus, as Linda Symcox states, "the process

[55] Nash, Crabtree, and Dunn, *History on Trial*, 1997, 159.

by which the *Standards* were developed represented a vast collaboration [among those] with a stake in the teaching of history in the schools."[56]

For thirty-two months, members of these groups deliberated on some of the fundamental questions that the NHSP had to confront in their quest for comprehensive U.S. and world history standards. One of the most hotly debated issues was multiculturalism. Whose history should be included in the standards and to what extent? Many felt that the new standards should do a better job of including the experiences of those groups that had traditionally been left out of the story of the nation's past such as racial, ethnic, and religious minorities. Others worried that such an emphasis on multiculturalism in history education might lead to national disunity, the "balkanization" of America. Founder of the Educational Excellence Network, Chester Finn wrote in a statement to the Council, "we must teach about diversity, to be sure, but we must never lose sight of what binds us together as a nation."[57] To this, others contended that many Americans had never been bound to the nation due to discrimination and exclusion at the hands of the majority.

In an effort to bring balance to the contentious issue of multiculturalism, the council drafted fifteen criteria to guide the development of the standards, emphasizing both diversity and unity. Criterion 7 began, "the history of any society can only be understood by studying all its constituent parts." Criteria 8, on the other hand, stated that standards should develop "understanding of our common civic identity and shared civic

[56] Linda Symcox, *Whose History?*, 2002.

[57] Chester Finn, The Educational Excellence Network, "Recommendations to the National Council for History Standards," 24 April 1992.

values within the polity." According to Nash, Crabtree, and Dunn, these two criteria drew wide support over the next two years of the project. They argued, "the council certainly took an accurate measure of the professional opinion and public sentiment on the question of inclusive history. And though debate was contentious, it never degenerated into rancorous disputes over how much of the curriculum should be awarded to one ethnic group or another. Consensus on these issues had been reached."[58]

A second issue facing the NHSP involved a debate about the definition of world history. One viewpoint defined world history as essentially synonymous with western civilization. Thus, history education should be mostly concerned with imparting ideals and knowledge rooted in Western civilization. Students would learn about the non-Western world only as it intersected with the Western world. A second viewpoint, however, advocated the "new world history," in which world history was reconceptualized from a global rather than a Eurocentric perspective. In order to be prepared to work in a global economy, students needed to understand how both Western and non-Western civilizations were situated within a global context. These two viewpoints clashed loudly and repeatedly over the course of the project. Those supportive of a Western civilization-style world history argued that American students, as members of the Western world, needed to understand "their own" history more than they needed to understand that of the "other." Indeed, historian Paul Gagnon argued, "It makes no sense for our schools to start anywhere but with the Western experience."[59]

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[58] Nash, Crabtree, and Dunn, *History on Trial*, 164.

[59] Paul Gagnon, *Democracy's Untold Story: What World History Textbooks Neglect* (American Federation of Teachers, 1987), 8.

Those supportive of the "new world history" argued that students could only fully understand the history of the Western world if they could situate that world within the larger global context. As the American Historical Association stated, "world history must be conceived as a truly global history, not as the history of Western civilization with occasional side glances at other cultures 'affected' by the West."[60]

Thus, it was left to those working on the National History Standards Project to make sense of these very differing arguments and reach some kind of balanced consensus if the project was to continue. Although reaching a compromise was no easy task, those working on the project believed they had done so. Criterion 9 stated, "Standards in world history should include different patterns of political institutions and ideas and aspirations developed by civilizations in all parts of the world." Criterion 13 read, "Standards in world history should treat the history and values of diverse civilizations, including those of the West, and should especially address the interactions among them." As the project moved from these criteria to the actual writing of the standards, however, it became apparent that the problem of consensus remained.

A third issue facing the NHSP centered less on what students should learn and more on how students should learn it. According to the projects co-directors Nash and Crabtree, "the council was obliged to scrutinize fundamental assumptions about the relationship in history education between content mastery and critical thinking."[61] In other words, should students of history simply memorize a litany of facts, or should

[60] American Historical Association, "Report of the World History Focus Group of the American Historical Association, National History Standards Project," 18 May 1992.

[61] Nash, Crabtree, and Dunn, *History on Trial*, 175.

students delve deeper into the content and learn to "think historically" about those facts? Most of those working on the project agreed that students should do both; debate arose over the relationship between content and thinking skills and whether or not the two things should be separated or combined within the written standards. In the end, a compromise was reached in which standards in historical thinking were supplemented with teaching examples and linked to content guidelines.[62] According to those working on the project, a consensus was emerging with the Organization of American Historians proclaiming the thinking standards were clear, accessible, and substantive. The Organization of History Teachers concurred stating that the "revised History Thinking Standards have transformed what was one of the weaker sections…to a new area of strength."[63]

For over two years, the NHSP council worked to establish comprehensive education standards in both U.S. and world history. In May 1994, the council, forum, and task force met for their thirteenth meeting. It was time to decide when and how the standards would be published. At this final meeting, there was some debate about whether or not to include the examples illustrating how teachers might use the standards. Some groups such as the American Federation of Teachers wanted to place the examples at the end of the standards or in a separate volume so as to shorten the length of the standards. Others, however, felt it was necessary to keep the examples where they were

[62] The five major "thinking standards" included chronological thinking, historical comprehension, historical analysis and interpretation, historical research capabilities, and historical issues analysis and decision-making.

[63] Organization of History Teachers, "Response to the Proposed United States History Standards from Reconstruction Through the Present," April 1994.

as an aid to understanding how the standards could be used to inform classroom practices. According to the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the teaching examples would "help educators and citizens understand that the content standards were calling for a fundamentally different type of instruction and to show that content knowledge was not being sacrificed" to historical thinking.[64] Again, the NHSP council needed to reach a consensus to move the standards forward to publication. The council recommended publishing three versions of the standards – a short summary; a basic edition for school boards, administrators, legislators, and parents; and an expanded edition for teachers and curriculum developers. The council agreed that the expanded edition should be published first.

The NHSP council and its editorial teams spent the summer of 1994 on last-minute reviews and revisions, readying the standards for publication in the fall. In general, opinions of the standards and the project as a whole seemed to be overwhelmingly positive. As Nash recalled,

> favorable reviews of these revisions convinced the project directors that the time had come to go to press. David Baumbach, an experienced teacher and council member, read the changes and reported, "Overall, I think the latest draft is superb." Ramsey Selden, speaking for the CCSSO, announced, "This document will, as it should, set the standard for a true world history." Jerry Bentley, a Renaissance historian and editor of the *Journal of World History*, wrote, "I enthusiastically endorse the draft standards, which I believe represent precisely the approach that American schools should take to history instruction in the late twentieth century and beyond.[65]

[64] Council of Chief State School Officers, "Summary of the CCSSO Focus Group Meeting for Standards in U.S. History," 26 May 1992.

[65] Nash, Crabtree, and Dunn, *History on Trial*, 186.

The project seemed to have fulfilled its mission – reaching consensus on controversial issues regarding history education while representing a broad spectrum of participants.

Yet not everyone was pleased with the standards as the publication date loomed closer. In a critique of the standards, Gagnon called the document "deeply flawed and deficient," arguing that the standards gave too little attention to Western civilization and too much to Asia, Africa, and the Americas.[66] Soon Albert Shanker and Chester Finn aligned themselves with Gagnon. Despite the criticisms of these three educators, the NHSP entered into its final stage. Those working on the project felt that these criticisms had already been dealt with in multiple stages of the project and broad consensus had been reached. To scrap the standards and start again from scratch, as Gagnon suggested, would not have been feasible or acceptable to those who had worked so hard over the last two and a half years. Therefore, the NHSP proceeded with plans to publish the U.S. and world history standards in the fall of 1994.

The National History Standards were scheduled to be released on October 26, 1994. Less than a week before their release, however, Lynne Cheney wrote an opinion piece, which appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*. Entitled "The End of History," the editorial denounced the yet-to-be-released history standards, charging the authors with political correctness and excessive multiculturalism.[67] Cheney also argued that the standards neglected America's triumphs and heroes. The stinging editorial came as a shock to those working on the project because Cheney, as head of the NEH, had been

[66] Paul Gagnon, "Problems with World History Standards as Prepared by the National Center for History in the Schools," 20 June 1994.

[67] Lynne Cheney, "The End of History," *Wall Street Journal*, 20 October 1994.

amongst the first to sponsor the NHSP in the first place. Furthermore, Cheney had praised the project in her 1992 resignation speech from the NEH, considering the project one of her greatest accomplishments as chair. Throughout the debates over such issues as multiculturalism and world history, Cheney became more critical of the standards and more uncomfortable with continuing to promote standards she did not feel were worthy of adoption.

A chronology of the events following the publication of Cheney's editorial reveals much about how the consensus process quickly unraveled and how controversy over the standards exploded.[68] A few days after Cheney's article appeared, conservative radio talk-show host Rush Limbaugh said the standards, which he believed had been created in secret by a group of radical UCLA professors, should be "flushed down the toilet." Soon, mainstream journalists picked up the story as well. The *New York Times* ran an article on October 26 (the very day the standards were made public) entitled "Plan to Teach U.S. History is Said to Slight White Males,"[69] while the *Washington Times* published an article questioning whether the NHSP had wasted millions of taxpayer dollars two days later.[70] The *Washington Post* printed an opinion piece that sounded very much like Cheney's original denunciation of the standards,[71] while Charles Krauthammer

[68] Joe Weiner has written a chronology of how the events first played out in 1994. See Joe Weiner, "History Lesson," *The New Republic*, (January 2, 1995): 9-11.

[69] "Plan to Teach U.S. History is Said to Slight White Males," *New York Times*, October 26, 1994.

[70] As cited in Weiner, "History Lesson," 10.

[71] As cited in Weiner, "History Lesson," 10.

wrote an article for the same publication on November 4 entitled "History Hijacked."[72] The problem with all these articles, as Weiner and Symcox have made clear, is that the authors tended to rely on Cheney's opinion piece rather than the actual standards for their critiques. Few journalists and fewer editorialists actually read and referenced the standards themselves. According to Symcox, "it is clear that during the early days of the controversy, journalists and editors found it more convenient to quote from the Cheney script, rather than to do their own research."[73] In his research into the chronology of the controversy, Weiner found that it was not until three months after Cheney's editorial that a major newspaper (the *New York Times*) featured an article that was based on the actual content of the standards.[74] According to the article, the standards indeed increased attention to non-European history but not at the expense of traditionally important figures and events of the history of Western society.

How did the public discourse over the standards take this direction so quickly? In her initial attacks on the standards, Cheney focused on the teaching examples rather than the actual standards. Thus, it was the teaching examples that became the center of the controversy rather than the standards themselves. Because Cheney managed to attack the standards even before they were made public, she and those in her camp were able to focus the discourse as they chose, putting the NHSP and its supporters on the defensive from the start. Cheney rarely, if ever, mentioned the actual thirty-one U.S. history standards, which were essentially broad generalizations about broad topics in American

[72] Charles Krauthammer, "History Hijacked," *The Washington Post*, November 4, 1994.

[73] Symcox, *Whose History*, 128.

[74] "Maligning the History Standards," *New York Times*, (February 13, 1995): A14.

history. Rather, Cheney chose to focus her critiques on about twenty-five of the 2,600 classroom activities and teaching examples attached to the standards. Cheney and her supporters either misunderstood or misrepresented the teaching standards to the public in their critiques. The teaching examples were not, nor were they ever meant to be, content standards. They were not there to mandate what should or should not be taught in American classrooms; rather, they were created by teachers and for teachers as an aid to illustrate how the standards *might* be used to promote active learning strategies and critical thinking skills. The actual content would be left up to the states and localities. Using the broad framework of the standards, individual districts would decide what to teach their students and use the teaching examples as just that – examples – of how they might go about teaching that content.

Given this rather crucial misunderstanding or misrepresentation of the standards, those involved in the NHSP were understandably frustrated and angered over the controversy regarding the standards that they had worked so hard to create. If the critiques by Cheney and her colleagues had been aimed at the standards themselves, then perhaps some sort of dialogue could have ensued between the two sides. But by failing to critique the standards and focusing all the attention on the teaching examples, Cheney and her supporters left little room for an open discussion. Furthermore, Cheney and her fellow critics also misrepresented the very nature of the two-and-a-half year collaborative process by which the standards were developed, claiming that they were the result of a secret conspiracy among left-leaning professors who gathered at UCLA to draft standards with a heavy ideological agenda. Cheney, as one of the most prominent members of the

original History Task Force, knew very well this was not how the NHSP went about developing the standards. In fact, in 1992 when the project was getting organized and participants were being invited to take part, Cheney (along with Crabtree and Nash) had veto power over who would and would not be included in the project. Cheney was clearly in a position to know how the NHSP had been organized and how the project went about reaching consensus on controversial issues, surely at least some of her fellow critics knew as well, and surely they knew they were misrepresenting the collaborative process to the public when they spoke of "secret conspiracies" and "clandestine meetings."

Given these circumstances, those involved in the NHSP soon took issue with Cheney's and her fellow supporters' distortion of the standards project. Many expressed their anger and frustration in letters and articles featured in national publications. Consider, for example, a letter by Gloria Sesso and John Pyne that appeared in the *New York Times*:

> As two of the teachers involved in the writing of the National U.S. History Standards, we are appalled that we have become the object of a virulent ideological attack by Lynne Cheney and her cohorts. Scouring the hundreds of specific student activities that we helped draft, they have made a national issue out of perhaps half a dozen examples, and in the process have suggested that everyone involved in the project is obsessed with political correctness. All of the classroom teachers who wrote the Standards and developed the activities are mainstream educators with long experience in the classroom and are highly regarded by their colleagues, by students, and by parents. To be labeled as some sort of left-wing radicals by critics such as Ms. Cheney is an injustice to classroom teachers everywhere.[75]

[75] John Pyne and Gloria Sesso, Letter to the Editor, *New York Times*, February 7, 1995.

However, many letters by K-12 teachers like Pyne and Sesso (whether formally involved with the project or not) were never published by mainstream media outlets.[76] The media instead chose to focus on pundits, politicians, and even academic historians, leaving those most affected by the standards – K-12 teachers – out of the debate altogether. Published and highlighted rebuttals to Cheney's version of the NHSP were few and far between. Even though the Standards were eventually endorsed by such major newspapers as the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*, Cheney's view of the standards dominated by sheer volume and repetition. The NHSP attempted to mount a public relations campaign, and the NCHS urged members of various national education organizations such as the NEA and the AHA to write their local newspapers and congressmen in support of the standards. On January 12, 1995, Nash went so far as to meet directly with the critics at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. At the meeting, Nash agreed to address the criticisms of the standards by organizing a team of people to examine the standards and their teaching examples, correcting any instances of historical bias. Thus, Nash attempted to mollify the critics while maintaining hold of the original consensus. This attempt by Nash, however, was apparently too little too late for the critics, and the debate moved from the public to the political arena.

On January 18, 1995, Senator Slade Gorton, a freshman senator from the state of Washington, put forth a resolution to recall the Standards for many of the very same reasons Cheney had first articulated in "The End of History." Gorton concentrated his

[76] For example, Jean Johnson, a high school teacher from New York, sent the NCHS copies of ten letters she had written to the press, none of which were published.

attack of the Standards on the teaching examples rather than the actual standards and called for a more celebratory official history of the nation, claiming that the center's Standards posed a threat to the unity of America. The resolution called on the National Education Standards and Improvement Council (NESIC)

> to disapprove the center's history Standards, forbidding any federal funds to be awarded to, or expended by, the National Center for History in the Schools, after the date of enactment of this Act,…and, mandating that any federal agency providing funds for the development of Standards must require that the recipient of such funds should have a decent respect for the contributions of western civilization, and United States history, ideas, and institutions, to the increase of freedom and prosperity around the world.[77]

Gorton was so passionate in his plea to condemn and recall the Standards that he might have prevailed had it not been for those few senators who spoke up against an outright condemnation of the Standards. Senator Jeffords from Vermont as well as Senators Bingaham of New Mexico and Pell of Rhode Island proposed an amendment to Gorton's original resolution, making the original act nothing more than a "Sense of the Senate" resolution. Jeffords pointed out that the Standards were already under review and any action by the Senate would be premature in the extreme. He also praised the process by which the Standards had been developed and praised the Center's efforts to respond to the criticisms voiced by Cheney and her fellow critics.[78] Thus, it was this "Sense of the Senate" resolution that carried the day and passed 99-1. In essence, this meant that, while the Senate would agree to censure the current history standards, it would not place a

[77] U.S. Senate, Senator Slade Gorton of Washington speaking on National History Standards, *Congressional Record*, January 18, 1995 (S1026).

[78] Ibid.

binding prohibition on the NESIC. Despite this compromise, however, the Senate condemnation of the Standards only seemed to further legitimize the critics' attacks. As Symcox observed, "the Senate had lent the weight of its authority against the Standards, and this gave continued legitimacy to the campaign against them…the Senate, without the benefit of a single public hearing, appropriated the conservative attack on the Standards and turned it into law."[79] Once the Senate voted, politicians and appointees such as Richard Riley, U.S. Secretary of Education for the Clinton administration, soon distanced themselves from the Standards. Indeed, it seemed that there were very few people – from pundits to the press to politicians – who wanted to be associated with the now discredited Standards.

Yet all was not as it first seemed; there were those outside of NHSP who wanted to salvage the Standards even at this late stage. In the spring of 1995, several liberal organizations joined together to form a panel that would review the Standards on their merits and make recommendations for revisions. The panel worked under the watchful eye of Cross's Council for Basic Education[80] and was guided by leaders such as Charles Quigley, director of the Center for Civic Education, and Robert Schwartz, Education Director of the Pew Charitable Trusts. These foundations were not under the same political pressure as men like Riley and could therefore take a more holistic view of the Standards as well as other reform programs. The Pew, MacArthur, Ford, and Spencer

[79] Symcox, *Whose History?*, 145.

[80] Cross's Council for Basic Education is a nonprofit organization founded by Arthur Bestor in 1956. Its mission is "to ensure the primacy of intellectual and moral development in the schools by strengthening the academic curriculum."

foundations funded two independent review panels at a total cost of $100,000. The foundations also agreed to fund the NCHS revision process.

In June 1995, two separate panels – one for world history and one for American history – convened. Much like the original council, the panels included prominent public figures, teachers, and academic historians. The panels, however, included no one from the NCHS project to ensure the independence and integrity of the review panel. On October 11, 1995, the panel's report was released to the general public. Entitled *History in the Making: An Independent Review of the Voluntary National History Standards,* the report endorsed the Standards and recommended their adoption. The panels distinguished between the standards themselves and the accompanying teaching examples. While the Standards won praise from both panels, the panels recommended the deletion of the teaching examples, saying that in "their totality, the teaching examples give the mistaken appearance of a curriculum."[81] In short, the panels found that the Standards, minus the teaching examples, made a significant contribution towards strengthening student knowledge of history.

In the wake of the panel's report, some of the controversy surrounding the Standards died down, although Cheney and some of her fellow critics continued to argue that even the revised Standards were irreparably flawed.[82] The NCHS created a new advisory board and spent several months editing the Standards according to the panel's recommendations. The teaching examples were dropped, areas such as science,

[81] Council for Basic Education, *History in the Making*, i.

[82] See Lynne Cheney, "The National History (Sub) Standards," *The Wall Street Journal* (October 23, 1995): A16.

technology, and economics were strengthened, and some of the wording of the Standards was changed to address the demands of the critics. On April 3, 1996, the NCHS released the revised edition of the Standards. The reaction to the revised edition was much different than the reaction that met the first edition. Once critical of the Standards, Diane Ravitch and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. now co-authored an opinion piece for the *Wall Street Journal* in which they praised the revised Standards and essentially called for a truce in the bitter war over the history standards.[83]

Despite the seemingly endless quarrels over the National History Standards Project, the idea behind the project – to improve history education by creating "world-class" standards – continued to have a lasting impact on education reform, particularly at the state level. In the spring of 1996, as the panels met to review the Standards, the National Governors' Association also met for an Education Summit in which they recommitted to developing state education and assessment programs. Indeed, many states were already drafting new state standards and curricula frameworks. Of the thirty states already at work drafting state standards in history, twenty-eight were using the National History Standards. According to Nash, "school leaders, in short, were proceeding in exactly the manner that experienced educators…always expected they would – selectively and incrementally, consulting the National History Standards as advisory documents and taking from them what they found appropriate to their own projects and circumstances."[84] The National History Standards offered the schools a

[83] Diane Ravitch and Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., " The New, Improved History Standards," *The Wall Street Journal* (April 3, 1996): A22.

[84] Nash, Crabtree, and Dunn, *History on Trial*, 266.

valuable resource for improving education, but they were only a resource. Those working on and supportive of the project always assumed that the states and localities would adjust and modify the National History Standards to fit their particular needs.

Despite this ideal picture of the Standards in action, however, questions remained. There was still a certain level of anxiety about national standards and their perhaps overreaching federal control of America's public schools. Although Nash and his supporters did not intend the Standards to be federally mandated, who was to say what might happen in the future now that the cat was out of the bag so to speak? Others questioned the rigor of the state and local standards now in development and wondered whether states were prepared to implement them and hold teachers and students accountable for meeting them. Still others feared that the standards would be so broad in outline or so specific in detail as to be of little practical use to the classroom teacher. In 1996, when the National History Standards Project was finally complete, these and other questions remained. It would be many more years before a final verdict on the history standards was apparent.

CHAPTER 4

TEACHERS SPEAK ABOUT THE STANDARDS

The history of the National History Standards Project and the subsequent Alabama education standards is complex and controversial. How these standards came to be used by individual school systems and their teachers has not been explored in enough depth. One way of analyzing the impact of the standards and gaining a contextual background to the standards movement in education is through interviewing those who have been most affected on a daily basis by the standards themselves. This chapter focuses on history teachers in the state of Alabama and their understanding of and experience with the standards, both the National History Standards and the Alabama standards in social studies.

Seven high school history teachers in the state of Alabama were interviewed for this project.[85] Essentially, I began by contacting one teacher, who then put me in touch with another and so forth. Although I tried to think about maintaining a range with regards to such factors as school size, location, number of years of experience, and the age of the teacher, this study was not based on scientific sampling. After contacting the teachers, the interviews were conducted individually and generally lasted between two

[85] See Appendix A for information regarding individual teachers and the schools at which they taught.

and three hours. Again, the teachers were fairly diverse as far as age, educational background, and experience in the classroom as well as in the demography of the schools at which they were employed. In the interviews, the teachers were asked a series of questions that probed such things as their reasons for going into teaching, their beliefs about why history was an important component of the school curriculum, their knowledge of the National History Standards Project, and their experience with and opinions about the National History Standards as well as the Alabama state standards. I began with a set of questions that I asked each teacher, however, I let the conversation between the teacher and myself grow organically. If a teacher began talking about something that I had not prepared to ask them about, I let them speak their minds, especially if I thought the issue was significant to the study. The interviews were digitally recorded, and I also took extensive notes throughout the interviews.

After each interview, I would listen to the recordings, and selectively transcribe those parts of the interviews I found most significant. As I conducted more interviews, I looked for common themes as well as outliers to emerge. At times, I would go back to previous interviews to further transcribe from the recordings if I felt a new theme had emerged. After analyzing all the transcripts of the oral history interviews, a number of common and significant themes emerged among the participants of the study. These themes are listed briefly here but will be elaborated on throughout this chapter. Despite the participants' varied amounts of experience and differing levels of education, most of the teachers expressed similar reasons for pursuing teaching as a career but held differing views on why history was an important part of the school curriculum and how it should

be taught. Further, no matter when the teachers obtained their teaching certificates and began teaching, most of the teachers had little to no knowledge of the National History Standards Project or about how the Alabama state standards in history and social studies were developed. Most teachers indicated that they used the Alabama state standards in similar ways, although their use varied by degree depending on their specific school system. Although the participants expressed similar views of the Alabama standards, their views on education standards in general varied considerably. The participants also seemed to vary in their opinions regarding the federal government's role in public education. Finally, most of the teachers described ideal classrooms that were remarkably similar in design and shape.

One theme that emerged throughout the oral history interviews centered on why the participants decided on teaching as a career choice. Most of the participants expressed a need to do something purposeful with their lives, a need to have an impact on young people's lives in a positive way. As Sara stated, "I didn't want to sit in a box somewhere and stare at a computer screen. I wanted a job with a lot of human contact, and I knew being in the classroom would provide me with that [human contact]."[86] When questioned about whether or not there were other jobs that could also provide this same level of social interaction, Sara elaborated. "With teaching, it's more than just talking to people, being around people. It's taking a student from point A to point B, knowing that they wouldn't have gotten to point B without you."[87] Other participants

[86] Sara, interview by author, 12 October 2007, digital recording.

[87] Ibid.

expressed similar views, explaining that knowing that they could help young people learn something and leave the classroom with more than they brought into the classroom was the most important reason they went into the profession of teaching. According to Dan, "There's a ripple effect to teaching. You rarely make or see huge changes in a student's attitude or performance. Although that [huge changes] can happen, usually it's different. They learn a little here and there, and you don't think you're doing much for the students at all. But then, you see them a year later or two years later, and you know they've gotten to where they are in part because of the things you taught them. And that just feels good."[88] This need for having a lasting, positive impact on their students was expressed in one form or another by all the participants of the study. Although the teachers acknowledged that they often felt as if they were not succeeding on a daily basis, when reflecting on their careers overall, they expressed the belief that in the end they and other teachers like them did provide necessary and important services for public schools students.

But why history teaching specifically? What made these teachers choose to teach social studies and not math or science? Again, most of the participants expressed similar views. Many of the participants stated aptitude and interest as at least part of the reason for pursuing history as opposed to some other subject area. Jake explained, "I knew I wanted to go into teaching, and history just seemed like the most obvious choice for me since I didn't really like math or science, and I'd always done fairly well in my history

[88] Dan, interview by author, 20 October 2007, digital recording.

courses in high school."[89] Others concurred. According to Sara, "I didn't think I'd really like to be a math teacher or a science teacher. I did well in those subjects in school, but I didn't really like them. I enjoyed history and English though."[90] When pressed about why she chose history instead of English, Sara stated, "Well, I always thought that you could include literature in history courses more than you could include history in literature courses. Which is probably not exactly true, but it's what I remember kinda thinking at the time."[91] Although some of the teachers stated that they chose history because they were particularly drawn to the subject, others seemed less than enthused by history and social studies.

Despite inclination and ability, other participants expressed perhaps more thoughtful responses to the question, why history teaching specifically? For example, Jane believed that part of her purpose as a teacher was to prepare students to become active and productive members of society. To her, history and social studies provided a rich context for pursuing this goal. "I remember growing up and taking history and social studies in school and feeling like it was relevant in some way, feeling like I was learning how to become an American citizen. I think that's why I chose to be a history teacher – because I wanted to teach my students about the world outside of school and how to navigate it. More than math or science or even literature, history seems to me to teach students how to be a part of society."[92] Tom also expressed this idea of history as

[89] Jake, interview by author, 5 October 2007, digital recording.

[90] Sara of Alabama, interview by author, 12 October 2007, digital recording.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Jane, interview by author, 14 October 2007, digital recording.

citizenship education in his response. "My family was always really active in our community, volunteering and serving. History for me is about educating students about their communities and showing them that it's important to be active in their communities, large and small."[93] It is interesting to note that of the participants Jane and Tom were the oldest teachers and the teachers with the most experience in the classroom. Although more research would have to be done, there may be a relationship between the number of years in the classroom and the teacher's views on why they chose history teaching as a profession.

Another theme to emerge from the oral history interviews involved the participants' beliefs about why and how history should be taught in the public schools. Interestingly, despite stating similar reasons for entering the profession of teaching, the participants expressed dissimilar reasons for why history should be taught. Amazingly, two of the teachers (Alex and Dan) said that they had never considered why history should be taught. "I don't know. I've never really thought about it," replied Alex.[94] After thinking about it for a moment, he stated, "I guess I just sorta thought…I mean it's always been taught, so why wouldn't we teach history? Why wouldn't people want their kids to learn history?"[95] While the other participants had considered why history should be taught, they expressed varying reasons. For example, Tom, Sara, and Beth believed that history was an important component of the curriculum because students needed to

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[93] Tom, interview by author, 22 October 2007, digital recording.

[94] Alex, interview by author, 29 October 2007, digital recording.

[95] Ibid.

learn from the past if they were to make better choices in the future. As Beth stated, "I've always believed – and I know some people don't believe this – but I've always believed that you can learn from the past. You can look at Vietnam and study the history of that conflict and try not to make the same poor choices in the present or in the future."[96] Dan expressed similar reasoning, comparing the lessons of history to the lessons of mathematics. "In a way, it's similar to math or some other subject. You teach math so kids can use it today. You teach history so kids can use what they've learned. They can apply it."[97] Unlike Beth and Dan, however, Jane believed history should be taught for a different reason. "I think history is important for students to learn because it teaches them about people, about how people are alike and different. If we want to teach students how to get along in a society that's diverse and changing, we need to teach them about people, and history does just that."[98] Thus, despite stating similar reasons for pursuing a career in teaching, the participants expressed widely different ideas about why history was an important and essential part of the public school curriculum. Yet a common theme among all participants seemed to be that history was ultimately, at least in part, about passing on information to students.

The participants also expressed widely different opinions about how it should be taught. Some of the participants believed history should be taught chronologically as a kind of story, whereas others believed history should be taught in a way that pushed relevancy to the forefront. Jake seemed to favor a more behaviorist approach to the

[96] Beth, interview by author, 10 October 2007, digital recording.

[97] Dan, interview by author, 20 October 2007, digital recording.

[98] Jane, interview by author, 14 October 2007, digital recording.

subject of history. "I think the facts and dates are important. I want my students to know what happened and when. Once they know the facts, then we can talk about the whys. But the facts come first."[99] When pressed about how students should be taught the "facts," Jake explained, "I use a lot of lecture, a lot of reading, and writing. That's the bulk of what goes on in my classroom. I know other history teachers who use different activities and things, but I like to get the information to my students."[100] Like Jake, Beth expressed the need for getting "information" to her students before the "real" work of history could begin. "My students just can't make connections across time without a grounding in the facts. I have to teach them the places and events first, and then, we work on how things happened and why."[101] Participants like Jane and Sara, however, believed history could and should be taught differently. According to Jane, "I love everything about history, but I don't teach everything. I teach the things that I think are relevant to the lives of my students, or things that I think may be relevant to my students. Otherwise, what's the point? You can't teach everything."[102] When asked how she did this, Jane explained, "I teach history with current events in mind. I try and show connections to today. So we do a lot of comparisons, trying to see how history is like or unlike today and why that's important."[103] Sara, one of the youngest and newest teachers to the profession, was similar to Jane in emphasizing relevancy. Sara was also the

[99] Jake, interview by author, 5 October 2007, digital recording.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Beth, interview by author, 10 October 2007, digital recording.

[102] Jane, interview by author, 14 October 2007, digital recording.

[103] Ibid.

participant who most closely expressed a teaching philosophy based on a constructivist model. "I was taught that students should be responsible for their own learning. So I think history should be taught in a way that puts the student in charge. We do a lot of hands-on activities, working with primary documents and things like that. I kinda treat them like little historians."[104] Given the varying levels of experience and education among the participants, it is perhaps not surprising that they expressed such differing ideas about how history should be taught. It would be interesting to see how more time in the classroom would affect the way in which Sara approached the teaching of history. Would she remain committed to a constructivist approach or move more closely in line with her behaviorist colleagues?

Another theme to emerge and perhaps the most interesting with regards to the subject of this thesis was the participants' knowledge of the National History Standards Project. Three of the participants (Sara, Alex, and Dan) claimed no knowledge of the project or the resulting standards. These three participants responded that they could not recall ever having heard about the Standards from their professors in college and could not recall ever having seen or read the Standards either. As Sara stated, "If I did learn about them at some point, I don't remember it. It must not have been a big deal to my professors or anything."[105] When shown a copy of the National History Standards, neither Sara nor Dan could again recall having learned about them. After thumbing through the Standards, Alex stated, "It kinda looks familiar, I guess. But I don't know. I

[104] Sara of Alabama, interview by author, 12 October 2007, digital recording.

[105] Ibid.

can't really remember."[106] Jake and Beth on the other hand did remember learning about the Standards. Jake believed that he had learned about the project in his history of American education course, while Beth recalled having a teacher who actually required his students to make note of which standards were being touched upon in lesson plan designs along with the state standards. "He had us put in our lesson plans which standards our lesson went with. But that was only one course, and I never had to do that for any other professor or for my job. So I don't remember too much about them or how they were written or anything."[107] Unlike the other participants, Tom and Jane had a greater knowledge of the National History Standards, which most likely was a result of the fact that they were both already in the classroom in the early 1990s, when the push for national and state standards first began. They both remembered the controversy that erupted when the National History Standards were published. "I remember the whole thing," Tom responded.[108] "I remember that Limbaugh and Cheney were upset and all that. For awhile, it seemed like the National Standards were going to be really important, have a big impact, but it all died down really quickly after that."[109] When asked if the National History Standards ever affected him personally in his job as a history teacher, Tom replied, "No, not really. Not the National Standards. We were never required to use them or anything. I don't even remember ever actually reading them."[110] Jane expressed

[106] Jake, interview by author, 5 October 2007, digital recording.

[107] Beth, interview by author, 10 October 2007, digital recording.

[108] Tom, interview by author, 22 October 2007, digital recording.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Ibid.

similar recollections. "I remember hearing about them and reading them at the time, but I never actually used them to design lessons or anything. Not because they weren't any good, just because we didn't have to. I'd already been teaching for several years by the time they came out, so I had things pretty well set up by then."[111] Given the fact that the controversy was so loud and vitriolic at the time, it is interesting that the participants had little to no knowledge of the National History Standards Project. This is most likely due to at least two reasons. First, the Standards were never made mandatory by the federal government or state governments, and while individual states eventually did use them to create their own state standards, the National Standards seem to have had little impact on classroom teachers. Second, since the controversy over the National Standards has died down, there has been little attention given to them in teacher education courses or among historians of education. Thus, teachers that attended college since the middle of the 1990s probably received little instruction about the National History Standards.

The fourth theme to emerge from the interviews concerned the teachers' views about the problems or challenges they faced in teaching history. The teachers voiced similar concerns about the challenges they faced both within and outside the classroom. For example, every teacher interviewed expressed their frustrations over the amount of content they were accountable for covering in a given year. According to Beth, "Sometimes I'm just overwhelmed by the amount of history I'm supposed to cover. I feel like I just sort of hit on topics without being able to really explain anything to my

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[111] Jane, interview by author, 14 October 2007, digital recording.

students."[112] This was a familiar refrain by the end of the oral history interviews. The teachers believed, due to the sheer amount of history to cover, they were unable to provide more than a superficial glossing over of any given historical topic. Alex expressed the idea that teaching history was about checking off topics on a never-ending list. "It seems like I just spend most of my time going down a list and checking things off: Native Americans, check; Colonies, check; American Rev, check; Civil War, check. My teaching goals aren't about the material itself; it's like their about checking off the list."[113] Although the younger, less experienced teachers seemed to express more frustration about "the list", even Jane and Tom found coverage to be a major challenge to their teaching. Jane expressed the belief that the amount to be covered increased every year, yet she also said that she had learned over the years how to cover the content while providing depth for her students. "It certainly feels like the list of things to cover gets longer every few years, and that is a big challenge for teachers because how do you provide depth of that coverage for your students. But I think if you stick with teaching long enough, you learn how to do this. You learn where to dig deep and where to take shortcuts."[114] When asked how she did this, Jane echoed her previous comments about what she believed the purpose of history to be. "I dig deep where I think it's most relevant to my students, where it's most important. I take shortcuts when I think it's just stuff that will be on the graduation exam but won't be much more than trivia."[115]

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[112] Beth, interview by author, 10 October 2007, digital recording.

[113] Alex, interview by author, 29 October 2007, digital recording.

[114] Jane, interview by author, 14 October 2007, digital recording.

[115] Ibid.

Another problem these teachers faced with regards to teaching history was the issue of student motivation. Most of the teachers said that it was very difficult to motivate students to study history if the students were not already interested in the subject matter. According to Sara, "It's really hard to get my students interested in things that they believe don't matter and won't affect them. They can see how math is relevant to a certain extent or how learning to write well in English class is important. But learning about what happened in China in the 19th century just doesn't seem to be as relevant."[116] When asked how she attempted to combat this disinterest and lack of motivation, Sara laughed and said, "I don't know. I'm still learning. It's probably my biggest weakness right now."[117] Others expressed similar struggles. Dan mentioned that he attempted to combat disinterest by relating historical issues to current issues, but he also had some reservations about employing this method. "I have found that relating historical issues to present-day issues works to a certain extent. But I don't know…I don't always like to do that because I've found the class then tends to become about current issues. The current issue becomes the focus of the class and the actual history goes by the wayside."[118] Dan also worried that by focusing on relating historical issues to the present he was perhaps not covering certain historical issues that did not clearly relate to the present. Unlike many of the other teachers, Tom tried to motivate his students by focusing on the skills that students learned through studying history. Skills they could take with them into

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[116] Sara of Alabama, interview by author, 12 October 2007, digital recording.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Dan, interview by author, 20 October 2007, digital recording.

other areas of school and their lives such as reading comprehension, critical analysis, and strong writing. "I try and tell them that, even if they could care less about the specifics of history, simply by studying history they are learning key skills that will help them in other areas."[119] It seems then that student motivation is a critical challenge for most history teachers, and teachers attempt to combat student disinterest in a variety of ways.

The final major challenge facing teachers of history expressed by the teachers involved student ability. Teachers must contend with diverse classrooms in which the ability of students varies widely. Trying to decide how to teach history to a group of students that include some students on a fourth or fifth grade reading level as well as students on an eleventh or twelfth grade reading level poses its own set of problems. "I think one of my biggest problems is simply creating lesson plans that all my students can do," said Beth.[120] "I've got students who can barely read the textbook, which is not written on a very high reading level, and I've got students who need much more challenge. It's hard to teach to both groups at the same time, so that I don't have students who are frustrated or bored."[121] Other teachers concurred. According to Jake, "It's frustrating for me when I can't do everything I'd like to do because I have to slow down constantly and make sure my lowest performing students are still with me. I know my average and above average students get frustrated too. And it's not that I'm not concerned about my lowest achievers or want them to do well, but at what expense? If I've got the majority of my class going full-speed ahead, when does it become unfair to

[119] Tom, interview by author, 22 October 2007, digital recording.

[120] Beth, interview by author, 10 October 2007, digital recording.

[121] Ibid.

them that I have to constantly pull back?"[122] Jake expressed a concern voiced by many teachers. How do you balance time spent with low achievers versus time spent with high achievers in a diverse classroom? This problem seems to be exacerbated by the need to get all students to perform at a certain level on mandated state tests, which are linked to funding. Do teachers end up spending more time getting their lowest achievers to just pass the test at the expense of time spent with average and high achievers excelling on the same test? In terms of how they attempted to deal with this issue of diverse student ability, the teachers interviewed used similar methods and techniques. Most of the teachers did a lot of pair or group work, making sure a low achiever was paired with a better achieving student. Others employed the use of alternatives. For example, students could either write an essay or do an oral presentation with visual aids. These were some of the more common techniques employed by the teachers to help bridge the gap between their lowest and highest achievers.

Yet another theme of the oral history interviews concerned the teachers' understandings of how the Alabama state standards in social studies and history were developed. Much like the National History Standards Project, few of the teachers knew much about how or even when the state standards were developed. Only Tom, who had an acquaintance involved in their creation, knew how the state standards came into being. Others either had no idea and said so or made accurate assumptions and guesses about their development. For example, Jane rightly said, "I guess they came out after the National Standards in reaction to those standards. I'd assume they actually mirrored the

[122] Jake, interview by author, 5 October 2007, digital recording.

National Standards somewhat, although they're specific to Alabama. Most likely, a group of bureaucrats and educational administrators and professionals got together to do the actual writing."[123] Although Jane was essentially right in her assumptions about how the Alabama state standards were developed, it was nonetheless still surprising that so few of the teachers interviewed had any knowledge about their creation given that the standards play such an integral part in Alabama's public schools today. When asked what they had learned about the Alabama state standards in their teacher education programs, most of the interviewees explained that they had learned what they were and that they had to use them in their teaching but that they had not learned how they were created. According to Sara, "I don't think we ever went into how they came about. We just learned that we had to consult the standards when planning our lessons, and we were accountable for making sure we taught what was in the standards and our students learned them."[124] This comment and others like it suggest that the teachers understand the standards as a finite document that they have little control over. This is interesting in light of the fact that those responsible for the creation of the National Standards always envisioned the standards (both national and state) as organic nature, open to varying interpretations and subject to change. Most likely people like Nash and Crabtree would be fairly disheartened to hear that the standards are not understood or viewed by teachers in this way.

[123] Jane, interview by author, 14 October 2007, digital recording.

[124] Sara of Alabama, interview by author, 12 October 2007, digital recording.

Despite the general lack of understanding about the development of the Alabama state standards, the participants use the standards in their schools and individual classes in similar ways. This is the sixth theme to develop from the oral history interviews. All of the teachers are required to turn in detailed lesson plans that illustrate how they are teaching the individual standards. The plans must clearly state which standards are being covered in the lesson. This documentation is kept on file and used by the school to show both the individual school district as well as the Alabama State Department of Education that they are in compliance with the law.

Besides using similar documentation methods, the participants also expressed similar techniques for using the standards in the development of their methods. Some of the teachers began with the standards and wrote their lesson plans from the standards themselves. According to Alex, "I go to the standards, figure out what I'm supposed to teach, and then write up a lesson that meets that standard."[125] When asked if his lesson plans covered one standard at a time or several, Alex stated, "Usually, my lesson will cover a couple, but I'm not great at integrating a whole bunch of standards into a lesson or unit. It's usually point by point, standard by standard."[126] This reaffirms Alex's earlier description of the standards as a checklist to be checked off one by one. Others, however, were able to cover multiple standards in a single lesson or unit plan. For example, Beth also begins her lesson planning by looking at the standards, but she attempts to integrate more standards into each lesson. "I try my best to cover three or

[125] Alex, interview by author, 29 October 2007, digital recording.

[126] Ibid.

four standards in each unit, to make sure that I'm treating them as a cohesive whole rather than separate standards. But that's not always easy to do. Sometimes I can't even see the connection between the standards myself, so I end up just focusing a lesson on a single standard."[127] When asked if they found they had time to teach more than just the standards, both Beth and Jake answered in the negative. "No way," said Beth. "I barely have enough time to get through the standards as it is. There's hardly any time for me to just teach something I find interesting if it's not actually in the standards."[128]

While Beth and Jake started with the standards, others did the opposite. These participants began by designing their lesson plans and then looking at the standards to see which standards those lesson plans encompassed. Even these participants, however, had an idea of what needed to be covered according to the standards before they began. As Tom stated, "I know generally what I'm supposed to cover. So I design my lessons with this general idea in mind, and then I look at the standards. I see which ones I've met, and I try to see if I can integrate any others along the way."[129] Sara worked similarly to Tom. "I like to design the lesson first, but I always have the standards in mind. But I find I usually design more interesting lessons if I don't start with an individual standard."[130] Unlike Alex, Tom and Sara were able to integrate multiple standards within each lesson or unit of study, probably because they worked from the lesson to the standards. Both Tom and Jane also found that they had the time to go beyond the standards, integrating

[127] Beth, interview by author, 10 October 2007, digital recording.

[128] Ibid.

[129] Tom, interview by author, 22 October 2007, digital recording.

[130] Sara of Alabama, interview by author, 12 October 2007, digital recording.

lessons that were not specifically related to the state standards. "I think the standards are fine as a starting point, but I think teachers need to make an effort to do more than just the standards. I teach the standards, but I teach a lot more than just the standards," said Jane.[131] This coincides with the idea that the standards are minimum and not a maximum; teachers are free to go beyond the standards so long as they meet the minimum along the way. However, as Beth mentioned, the list of standards is so very long as it is that teachers, even experienced teachers, can find it difficult to do much more than the minimum.

One difference in how the teachers used the standards was really about how the schools mandated the use of the standards. While some schools allow individual teachers to cover the standards in any way and at whatever time of the school year so long as they cover all the standards, other schools employ pacing guides in attempt to ensure that teachers move through the curriculum and cover the standards at particular times in the school year. These pacing guides can range from the very specific to the very general. Some pacing guides tell teachers when they should teach each specific standard or specific groupings of standards, while other pacing guides simply tell teachers generally where they should be at any particular time of the semester. Although such pacing guides do not prevent teachers from being creative in the way they approach the standards, it seems likely that the more specific the pacing guides are the less room teachers have to shape the curriculum as they choose. For example, what happens when students fail to fully understand a lesson but the pacing guide says the teacher must move on to the next

[131] Jane, interview by author, 14 October 2007, digital recording.

topic? How are teachers to reconcile the needs of the students with the need to adhere to the pacing guide? According to Dan, this can be quite problematic but not insurmountable. "There are times when I run out of time, and the pacing guide tells me I need to move on. When that happens, I do different things depending on the scenario. If I think the next topic won't take that long to cover, I'll go ahead and finish what I'm working on and just play catch-up. My principal is okay with this, but I'm not sure what I'd do if I had a principal that wasn't [okay with this]…I guess a lot would be left uncovered…Although that's not much different than now, is it?"[132] Similarly, Beth also suggested she felt pressure to move on to the next topic to keep up with her school's pacing guide. "I do wonder if I ever really get a chance to finish anything completely. It just seems like a lot is left unsaid, unfinished. But I'm not sure if that's because of the pacing guide or just because of the nature of teaching itself. You always feel like you're racing against the clock no matter what."[133] Even when there is no formal pacing guide, the need to keep the pace up and cover as much material as possible remains. For example, Jane's school does not have a written pacing guide, but she says her principal checks in with the teachers to "make sure the teachers are where they should be" at any given time in the school year.[134] It seems that pacing guides tied to the state standards provide a heightened level of pressure on the teachers. Even without formal pacing guides, however, that pressure to "cover the material" remains. Interestingly, no teachers mentioned how they felt about the pacing guides, whether they liked or disliked the

[132] Dan, interview by author, 20 October 2007, digital recording.

[133] Beth, interview by author, 10 October 2007, digital recording.

[134] Jane, interview by author, 14 October 2007, digital recording.

guides. In part, this could be because pacing guides have become so routine that few teachers even think about their own feelings about the guide.

A final theme to emerge from the oral history interviews centered on the participants views regarding Alabama's state standards as well as educational standards in general. Most of the participants disliked the state's standards in social studies education, and most disliked them for two key reasons. First, again and again the teachers expressed the view that the standards were much too detailed and much too long. The standards, in their views, amounted to little more than a laundry list of trivia to be committed to memory by the students for the Alabama graduation exam and quickly forgotten thereafter. "There's just too much," said Alex.[135] "There's no way my students can remember all that even if I could teach it all."[136] Tom concurred, "I think their [the state standards] are just too specific, too detailed. There's so much nitty-gritty detailed stuff that it's often hard to spend time on the big picture, the big themes and ideas of history."[137] Second, teachers disliked the way in which the standards were so intimately tied to high-stakes testing. "Obviously, we need standards in education, but we also need to realize that learning is more than memorization and regurgitation. And that's what I think is the biggest problem with the standards," said Jane.[138] "The students have to memorize snippets of information that in and of themselves mean nothing. Then, they have to hope that they can remember everything they've learned over the course of years

[135] Alex, interview by author, 29 October 2007, digital recording.

[136] Ibid.

[137] Tom, interview by author, 22 October 2007, digital recording.

[138] Jane, interview by author, 14 October 2007, digital recording.

in order to pass a single test that decides if they graduate or not. From my perspective, that's just impractical."[139]

Jane, like all the teachers interviewed, expressed the view that standards are needed in education, but who should be responsible for creating those standards? Here the teachers expressed varying perspectives. For example, Jane, Tom, and Beth expressed the belief that the creation of education standards should happen at the local level rather than the state or federal level. They argued that teachers, administrators, parents, and other concerned citizens could and should have the responsibility of writing and implementing standards for their particular school system since they presumably knew the best the needs of their particular student population. According to Tom, "It seems like the local community isn't thought smart enough or responsible enough by the state and federal governments to take care of their own children, and I think this is wrong. Standards made at the state and federal government become more like one-size-fits-all, which is mediocre at best."[140] Jane, Tom, and Beth felt that the state and federal government's roles in education should be limited to monitoring the localities to make sure standards were in place and functional.

The other teachers interviewed, however, believed in a more central role for the state government. They expressed the belief that it was indeed the state's responsibility to make common educational standards for the entire public school system. This was the case despite their personal dislike of the current state standards in social studies. Many

[139] Ibid.

[140] Tom, interview by author, 22 October 2007, digital recording.

expressed the belief that standards set by the state was the best way to ensure an equal education for all students in the state of Alabama. According to Sara, "I think without state standards you'd get some schools that had great academics and some schools that had poor academics. At least this way, there's a commonality there. Everyone at least gets the same minimum education."[141] When asked who at the state level should actually be in charge of the business of writing the standards, most of these teachers were unsure and often could not give an answer. Alex suggested, "I guess it would be people that work at the State Department of Education. You know, hopefully people who have a background in education."[142] All of these teachers, however, expressed similar ideas to Jane, Tom, and Beth about the federal government's role in education. They did not believe the federal government should provide more than a monitoring role at best. Beyond making sure the state was providing fair and equitable education for all, the teachers did not elaborate on what this monitoring role would entail.

Despite their diverse teaching experiences and opinions on the role of standards in education, the participants described their ideal classrooms in similar ways, which constitutes the seventh and final theme. Most believed the ideal classroom experience would be one characterized by an abundance of time and resources. "If I could just have more time, I think I could solve most of my problems. Even just an extra half-hour a day would go a long way," said Sara optimistically.[143] Similarly, Jake expressed a need for more resources to help him deal with classes that contained students facing academic

[141] Sara of Alabama, interview by author, 12 October 2007, digital recording.

[142] Alex, interview by author, 29 October 2007, digital recording.

[143] Sara of Alabama, interview by author, 12 October 2007, digital recording.

challenges such as poor reading and writing abilities. Others suggested that the ideal classroom would include hard-working and engaged students, and while the teachers believed it was their job to motivate the students, they also expressed the belief that parental support was a necessary component. "My ideal classroom is one in which the students actually do their homework and come prepared to work, and that means parents willing to lend a hand at home," said Alex.[144] Finally, some teachers expressed the desire for less bureaucracy and paperwork. "I sometimes feel like the bulk of my time is not spent on teaching or preparing to teach but on filling out paperwork for accountability reasons. I understand that it's important to have records and everything, but you'd think if you're called a "teacher," you'd spend the bulk of your time teaching," said Dan.[145] So despite having different reasons for going into teaching and having different purposes in their teaching, the teachers described their ideal classroom in very similar ways.

In general, the thread that seems to bind all these emergent themes together has to do with professionalism. Are teachers professionals with expertise, or are they merely skilled factory workers? If teachers consider themselves professionals and others concur, then do they need stringent standards and pacing guides? Do they need to be told when and how to teach subject matter that they presumably studied quite extensively in school? The problem stems from the fact that many teachers today do not see themselves as professionals, and therefore, many do not demand that society see them as professionals either. They seem more than willing to hand over much of their autonomy to the state

[144] Alex, interview by author, 29 October 2007, digital recording.

[145] Dan, interview by author, 20 October 2007, digital recording.

and federal governments, to bureaucrats and policy makers who supposedly know best how to educate our citizenry. This lack of professionalism leads many teachers like those interviewed to simply follow whatever path is laid out for them. Thus, we hear teachers bemoan that there is no time to cover all the material in the standards and pacing guides but few teachers go any further than complaining to one another. Few go so far as to call for and organize any real change in the standards and their implementation.

CHAPTER 5

THE NATIONAL HISTORY STANDARDS AND THEIR UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

The National History Standards Project generated much controversy, anger, and confusion during the early 1990s. Given this, it is perhaps most surprising that history teachers today seem to know little about the project itself. Five of the seven history teachers interviewed for this thesis knew little if anything about the NHSP, and several of the teachers could not recall having ever heard of the project's name let alone specifics about the NHSP. Of the remaining two participants, only one knew about the National History Standards in any real depth. Thus, it begs the question: did the NHSP matter? If today's teachers say they were never much affected by the development of national history standards, then perhaps the controversy engendered by the NHSP had no lasting impact other than to serve as another dividing line between conservative and liberal scholars and academics. The problem with this conclusion, however, is that it ignores the fact that the NHSP did matter if for no other reason than the project's unintended consequences. These unintended consequences affected more than just academics; they affected and continue to affect teachers and students whether they are fully cognizant of this or not.

When Gary Nash and his associates got together to create a set of *voluntary* national standards for the teaching and learning of history, they did so most likely with only the best of intentions. They also did so at the behest of and with the support of more conservative and traditional scholars and bureaucrats like Lynn Cheney and Diane Ravitch. The idea was a simple one and seemed destined for success. Create a set of voluntary national history standards to help schools and parents decide what students should know and how it might be taught. The standards were to be voluntary and serve only as one of many resources. As local communities and states developed their own standards, they could look to the national standards, picking and choosing from the standards as they saw fit. The idea seemed so very benign and commendable. No one could have foreseen the fiery storm that would erupt in October of 1994 when Lynn Cheney published an editorial page article attacking the standards. Although battles over the curriculum were nothing new, the wars over school history began with a fresh start, as chronicled earlier in this thesis. Historians themselves had long debated the nature and purpose of history, but the war over the Standards nationalized and politicized the debate in a way that previous history wars had not. Cheney's editorial suggested that Kliebard's forces were alive and well, with Cheney representing the traditionalists and people like Nash representing perhaps the child-centered or social meliorist position.

The direct consequences of the battle over the national history standards are readily apparent. The National History Standards were criticized heavily before they were even published, resulting in months of revisions and rebuttals. When they were finally published and made available to the public, it was with very little fanfare. Years

of hard work by education professionals, historians, and teachers seemed to amount to very little in the end.

And there the legacy of the National History Standards might have ended. By the late 1990s, however, the call for education standards was not diminishing but increasing. The focus moved from voluntary national standards to mandatory state standards, and these state standards would be linked to accountability measures like standardized testing. This change in focus marks the true unintended consequences of national standards like those created by Nash and his colleagues. Some of the same people, who once clamored for national standards that would act merely as guidelines for individual states, were now going one step further and clamoring for mandatory state standards.[146] Many of those who had worked on the national initiatives were appalled at the idea of mandatory standards, never having intended for standards to have been mandated at any level let alone at the faraway state level.[147] After nearly a decade of having heard the phrase "education standards" bandied about, however, it was not difficult to convince the American public of the need for mandatory state standards. If one considers Kliebard's forces, it seems that the traditional and social efficiency forces are "winning." That is, those who advocate a fixed canon of historical knowledge and those who believe students' understanding of that fixed body of knowledge can be measured scientifically seem to be the driving force behind the history curriculum today.

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[146] Abigail Thernstrom, "No Excuses" in *Will Standards Save Public Education?*, ed. Deborah Meier (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 35.

[147] Deborah Meier, "Educating in a Democracy" in *Will Standards Save Public Education?*, ed. Deborah Meier (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 5.

When President George W. Bush proposed the No Child Left Behind Act in 2000, education standards took on a whole new level of importance. Congress passed the act in 2001, and on January 8, 2002, President Bush signed it into law. In addition to continuing previous patterns of provision and funding for education, NCLB also formally institutionalized standardized testing. From then on, public schools were measured by how well their students performed on standardized tests, and these tests would supposedly be linked to and based on the written education standards in a given state. Since national corporations wrote the tests, however, the standards themselves were for all intensive purposes nationalized. Although it remained up to each individual state to write their own standards, one state's standards began to look much like another's. No longer were the standards merely voluntary; schools that received federal funding had to test and testing was based on standards.[148] NCLB created a situation that continues to exist today in which standards became inextricably linked to high-stakes standardized testing and accountability measures that imposed negative consequences on schools and students that did not measure up. Thus, whether teachers like those interviewed in Chapter 4 realize it or not, initiatives like the NHSP from the 1990s had a huge and lasting impact on education today. Although few could have foreseen the consequences then, it is nevertheless true that America began walking down the path towards mandatory standards and testing long before NCLB; NCLB was in many ways merely the culminating point of the march, a march begun by conservative and liberal educators and bureaucrats alike.

[148] Anne Turnbaugh Lockwood, *Standards: From Policy to Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 1998), 16.

The impetus for the NHSP came from reports such as *A Nation at Risk*, in which the American public was persuaded that there was a real crisis in education. Researchers such as Ravitch and Finn contributed to the debate by arguing that American students left high school virtually ignorant about much of the humanities.[149] Media outlets cited statistic after statistic that supposedly served as proof for how little students seemed to be learning in America's public schools.[150] Standards, it was argued, would be the answer to the nation's education problems. In a complex and expanding world, education professionals and parents needed some help in identifying what was important for students to learn. By creating guidelines in the form of voluntary standards, schools across the nation would essentially be "on the same page" and all students would receive at least a basic education. That was the promise of the 1980s and 1990s.

The irony is that overall the statistics that were cited in reports like *A Nation at Risk* have changed very little. For all the reforms that were put in place in the late 1990s and 2000s, there seems to be very little in the way of improvement, at least as measured by current means. For example, according to *The Washington Times*, the 2006 National Assessment of Education Progress revealed that over 50-percent of the United States' high-school students failed the U.S. History portion of the test.[151] Two decades ago, Ravitch and Finn pointed to this same test, citing similar results. In 1987, they argued for

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[149] Diane Ravitch and Chester Finn, *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987).

[150] A range of media outlets covered the debate about public education in the United States following *A Nation at Risk* and into the 1990s. Although most cited statistical evidence, it was often the same evidence cited over and over. Many took their statistics directly from the report and Ravitch and Finn's book.

[151] *The Washington Times* (Washington, D.C.), 17 May 2007.

more standards and more standardized testing to hold teachers and students accountable. Since then, literally thousands of standards have been written, taught, and tested. Yet the statistics – the test results – remain the same. What is one to conclude other than the standards and accountability measures put in place were not and are not the answer to America's education problems? Perhaps this is because we are measuring students' historical knowledge in the wrong ways. The easiest and cheapest way to test students is by using "objective" tests such as multiple choice exams. However, to gain an understanding of students' knowledge, we might be better served by other kinds of tests such as performance-based exams.

To be sure, scholars and policymakers who continue to support education standards and standardized testing are critical as well. On the whole, however, they are critical not of having standards but of how the standards are implemented by teachers and administrators. The argument goes something like this: the standards are in place and the tests have been written. If students are still performing poorly, the blame must lie with the teachers and school administrators who fail to instruct students properly. Critics who use this line of reasoning often point to poor teacher education programs and ballooning school bureaucracies as evidence for their arguments, and there is something to this.[152] Yet what the critics ignore is just as important and informative with regards to why the standards and accountability movement is failing. Mandatory standards and high-stakes accountability measures have led to a serious erosion of educational quality in many parts of the nation. Teachers spend less time on the curriculum and more time teaching

[152] Sherman Dorn, *Accountability Frankenstein: Understanding and Taming the Monster* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2007), 7.

students how to take standardized tests. The pressure to test well has increased to the point where teachers are literally cheating on standardized tests for fear of losing their jobs if students do not perform well enough.[153] Many of the teachers interviewed expressed similar concerns and reported feeling enormous pressure to "cover" the material, teach to the test, and have their students perform well on standardized tests almost to the exclusion of all else.

Nearly a decade and a half after the National History Standards were first published, many on the left and right still dislike the way standards in general are written. Just as the NAEP's numbers have remained relatively static, so has the debate over what should or should not be included in education standards. In 2003, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute published an analysis on the state of state U.S. history standards. The standards were rated on comprehensive historical content, sequential development, and balance. Only six states earned A's for outstanding standards, while five earned B's. Thirty-one states were cited as having done a minimally satisfactory job on their standards. Seven C's, eight D's, and twenty-three F's were assigned.[154] There are similar studies for world history standards. In 2006, the Fordham Institute graded the world history standards, concluding that two-thirds of states were not giving students a thorough grounding in world history.[155] Organizations such as the Fordham Institute rarely agree with one another on what good standards look like, yet they can all seem to

[153] Ibid, 36.

[154] Chester E. Finn, Jr., Michael J. Petrilli, and Liam Julian, *The State of State Standards 2003* (Washington, D.C.: The Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2003).

[155] Chester E. Finn, Jr., Michael J. Petrilli, and Liam Julian, *The State of State Standards 2006* (Washington, D.C.: The Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2006).

agree that the current standards do not measure up. Unlike the Fordham Institute, those more attuned and in line with the "left" argue against the very idea of mandatory state standards and often advocate standards at the local level.

It seems not unreasonable to argue that over the last two decades the emphasis has been on numbers and grades rather than on the people involved in education today – the teachers, students, parents, and other concerned community members. When national standards were first proposed, much of the American public was aghast at the thought of handing over their power and responsibility for the education of their children to the federal government. Handing over power to the state governments proved a little easier to swallow and perhaps seemed like a good compromise at the time. Education has historically been a state issue rather than a federal one, but up until the 1980s and 1990s, counties and cities seemed to retain a great deal of control over education. As the push for state standards and state forms of testing and accountability measures increased, however, the localities lost much of that control. If the standards and accountability movement had met with greater success, perhaps this would not seem like such a bad thing. Yet the standards movement has met with limited and questionable success, and it will be interesting to see if in the not-too-distant future, the localities begin to wrest back control from state and federal governments. In this instance, at least, advocates of social efficiency appear to be losing some ground. If mandatory standards and high-stakes tests are not paying off in terms of student achievement, people are beginning to ask if something else should take their places.

One problem the American public will face when attempting to gain back more control over public education, however, is the kind of out-of-control rhetoric used by supporters of standards and the accountability system. For example, in 2004, former U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige called the National Education Association a "terrorist organization" for its opposition to NCLB.[156] Add to that the appeal of the fact that something indeed has changed in education since the adoption of this accountability system, and many Americans are attracted to change for change's sake, whether that change proves beneficial in the end or not. Moderate critics of the accountability system are not helped by some of those who criticize standards and testing, seeing the goals of accountability as inherently evil in some way. For example, Susan Ohanian has called advocates of high-stakes testing standardistos, and Marion Brady has argued that standards themselves are inappropriate.[157] As Sherman Dorn states, "to many critics of high-stakes accountability, trying to improve education by standardizing it is an obscene marriage of technocracy and democracy."[158] Their frustration with the current system is understandable to many, but calling their opposition standardistos and claiming that any kind of voluntary standards are inappropriate seems to only be adding fuel to the fire.

So what does it all mean? It is interesting to think about how the authors of the National History Standards might feel if they were to read the interviews from Chapter Four. After reading that few of the teachers know much of anything about the NHSP but almost all of the teachers feel confined by mandatory state standards, Gary Nash and his

[156] Sherman Dorn, *Accountability Frankenstein*, xii.

[157] Ibid, xii.

[158] Ibid, xiii.

colleagues would most likely have mixed opinions about the project. They may very well feel that in the end the project was not worth the controversy and time and energy, especially when projects like the NHSP have had such questionable impact on public education today. Yet they may also feel that, if the National History Standards had been used in the way they had originally intended, then the current accountability monster might never have been born. One wonders if, as evidence mounts against NCLB, the nation will turn back to a more voluntary system of standards and less high-stakes accountability measures. Undoubtedly, Nash and his colleagues would advocate such a plan. It is difficult to see that the NHSP will have a significant long-term impact on education, however. One looks back to Committees of Seven and Ten from the early part of the twentieth century and understands them as important for their time but not necessarily important for American education one-hundred years later. This most likely will be the legacy of the NHSP as well. While Nash and his colleagues would have, I think, embraced the debate over the nature of history, their vision of history was a constructed body of knowledge that always undergoes change did not win out in the end. I think Nash and his colleagues would most likely be disappointed that the NHSP has had such little positive impact on the way students are taught and tested in history.

If scholars like Kliebard and Symcox are right, and American education proceeds in cycles, surely the conservative cycle of reform begun in the 1980s with the presidential election of Ronald Reagan is coming to a close. America is closing in on thirty years of educational reforms characterized by their emphasis on excellence, standards, and accountability, characterized by Kliebard's traditional and social efficiency forces. If, as

mentioned earlier, NCLB was the culminating point of this cycle of reform, then the nation has turned the corner without even knowing it. U.S. education is most likely undergoing a shift or turn that future historians will see as the end of one cycle and the beginning of another. Whether the new cycle of reform fits into one of Kliebard's forces – traditionalists, child-centered movement, social efficiency, or social meliorists – or is some combination of those forces, or is something entirely new, remains to be seen. Within the next decade, historians and education professionals will have more evidence to draw upon to make these arguments and draw conclusions. I believe the National History Standards will matter very little in the long run, but that the project will be more important for its short-term effects. These effects included a move towards mandatory state standards and high-stakes testing as well as negative effects on the profession of teaching and the teaching and learning of history in the K-12 classroom.

CHAPTER 6

A BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY

The history of education in general and the history of American education specifically is unfortunately a rather neglected area of research among scholars. Very few education professionals and even fewer historians have made it their life's work to research and write on the history of education in the United States. As few resources exist on the history of American education, there are even fewer resources on the history of social studies education or the standards movement. Those resources that do exist often do not take a historical approach to their subject but are more like how-to manuals or statements of policy. Nevertheless, this essay attempts to provide the reader with some helpful information about the resources that do exist. The essay starts with the general and moves to the specific, from the history of American education to the history of the standards movement.

Anyone who wishes to learn about the long history of education in the United States would do well to start with one of two works: *American Education: A History* by Wayne J. Urban and Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr.[159] or *History of Education in America* by

[159] Wayne J. Urban and Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr., *American Education: A History, 3rd Edition*, New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 2004.

John D. Pulliam and James J. Van Patten.[160] In *American Education*, authors Urban and Wagoner present the history of American education from pre-colonial times to the present. The book provides an objective overview of each major period in the development of American education. Furthermore and most informatively, the authors set their analysis against the broader background of national and world events. Urban and Wagoner do not fail to address the history of minorities and women as it relates to the history of American education as well. Finally, the book offers substantial "For Further Reading" listings at the end of each chapter.

History of Education in America by Pullian and Van Patten also offers a balanced overview of the development of American education, beginning with its roots in the European educational tradition. The text provides a comprehensive historical treatment of education in the United States from Colonial times to the present day. Readers are introduced to the background behind the growth and evolution of education in our society, including influential movements in educational history and influential leaders. The authors also provide excellent coverage of recent events and issues, including the influence of legal and legislative actions and reform reports.

After gaining a firm foundation in the overall history of American education, readers may want to move on to *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980* by Diane Ravitch.[161] Ravitch has written prolifically on the history of education in the United States, and while many educators and historians find her views controversial, she

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[160] John D. Pulliam and James J. Van Patten, *History of American Education in America, 9th Edition*, Columbus, Ohio: Merrill, 2007.

[161] Diane Ravitch, *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980*, New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983.

remains among the most important scholars in the field of education today. *The Troubled Crusade* chronicles all the major events in the politics of education since World War II. The book examines a number of conflicting political, socioeconomic, and philosophical ideas that have made issues such as progressive education, race and education, and equality of opportunity verses equality of results so controversial in the decades that followed the war. In examining these issues, Ravitch is careful to clearly delineate the supporters and critics of the various reform movements that characterized the period. The historical material and documentation of the book provide reader with a wealth of resources regardless of ideological perspectives.

There are literally dozens upon dozens of books on the standards and accountability movements in education. Many of these books, however, are not historical in methodology. Most are policy manuals advocating a position for or against a given reform measure. Thus, the reader is left to read between the lines when it comes to understanding the history of the standards and accountability movements. There are, however, several books that are useful for understanding these movements and the arguments put forth by both sides of the issues. In *Will Standards Save Public Education?*, Deborah Meier as well as several of her colleagues in education contribute essays attempting to answer the question proposed in the title of the book.[162] The essays are short and clear, providing the basic arguments for or against state and national standards in education. W. James Popham tackles the difficult issue of standardized testing as mandated in the *No Child Left Behind Act* in *America's "Failing" Schools:*

[162] Deborah Meier, *Will Standards Save Public Education?*, Boston: Beacon Press, 2000.

How Parents and Teachers Can Cope With "No Child Left Behind."[163] While arguing that standards and accountability measures are indeed needed to ensure that all children get a quality education, Popham shows how standardized testing as currently mandated by the federal government is problematic in more ways than one. He offers a balanced, critical look at the current system and offers some tentative solutions to current problems. Finally, in *Accountability Frankenstein: Understanding and Taming the Monster*, Sherman Dorn contends that to understand the current movement for school accountability, one must first understand how contradictory education politics can be.[164] The book provides a broad perspective on the accountability debate by exploring the contradictions inherent in high-stakes testing. More importantly, Dorn examines the historical origins of test-based accountability and its social and political consequences.

Another important book co-authored by Diane Ravitch and Chester E. Finn, Jr. is *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?*[165] This book helped spark the debate over national standards and was one important component in the push for the development of national standards. The book suggested that the answer to the title question was "not much." The authors cited the results of an assessment funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities as evidence that seventeen-year-old Americans were essentially ignorant about history and literature. Since its publication, many scholars have criticized Ravitch

[163] W. James Popham, *America's "Failing" Schools: How Parents and Teachers Can Cope With "No Child Left Behind"*, New York: RoutledgeFarmer, 2004.

[164] Sherman Dorn, *Accountability Frankenstein: Understanding and Taming the Monster*, Charlotte, North Carolina: Information Age Publishing, 2007.

[165] Diane Ravitch and Chester E. Finn, Jr., *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?*, New York: Harper & Row, 1987.

and Finn's analysis of the data, much like scholars criticized the report *A Nation at Risk*. The importance of the book remains, however, in the fact that this book and other articles and reports like it was what prompted the call for higher education standards at the state and federal levels.

One of the biggest frustrations for anyone wishing to understand the National History Standards Project and its relation to the rest of the history of American education is a lack of objective, historically based sources. Those writing on the issue of standards for the teaching and learning of history are usually those who have or have had a central role in the standards movement and a large stake in the outcome of that movement. Nevertheless, there are some essential sources on the National History Standards Project and its aftermath. *History On Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* by Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn was one of the first books to chronicle the great national controversy that arose over the setting of voluntary standards for the teaching of history in elementary and high schools in the United States.[166] The book places the controversy firmly in the context of similar struggles in the past between those who would have children learn a fixed body of approved knowledge and those who emphasized the processes of producing historical knowledge and the skills that go along with its production. The book provides a play-by-play account of the National History Standards Project, and thus, is essential reading for anyone interested in the movement for standards within American education.

[166] Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, *History On Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past*, New York: Random House, 1997.

Similarly to *History On Trial*, Linda Symcox's *Whose History? The Struggle for National Standards in American Classrooms* depicts the ups and downs of educational reform movements in the United States during the twentieth century, focusing primarily on history and social studies in the K-12 classroom.[167] Symcox was the assistant director for the National History Standards Project from 1990 to 1996, and provides an insider's view of the controversy. She spends a great deal of time explaining how the traditionalists initially pushed for the National History Standards but were frustrated in the end by the people who wrote those standards. Symcox also chronicles the building and unraveling of the National History Standards that supports and enhances the version provided in *History On Trial*.

In *The Social Studies Wars: What Should We Teach the Children?*, Ronald W. Evans offers a brief history of the social studies curriculum and explores factors, groups, and forces that have made it difficult for a critical, issues-centered social studies curriculum to develop in the schools.[168] Evans identifies and describes the competing traditions that have waged war over the social studies curriculum including traditional historians, social scientists, social efficiency proponents, and social meliorists. While Nash and Symcox examine the development of national history curriculum standards, Evans explores the development of national social studies curriculum standards. He recounts how the National Council for the Social Studies did not garner as much support from bureaucratic organizations like the U.S. Department of Education as the various

[167] Linda Symcox, *Whose History? The Struggle for National Standards in American Classrooms*, New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 2002.

[168] Ronald W. Evans, *The Social Studies Wars: What Should We Teach the Children?*, New York: Teachers College Press, 2004.

academic disciplines that made up the social studies. By focusing on the development of social studies standards rather than just history standards, Evans offers new insights into the historical debate over the K-12 curriculum.

To better understand how the wars over the K-12 history curriculum fit within the broader culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s, there a number of works that the reader might find helpful to read. *History Wars: The "Enola Gay" and Other Battles for the American Past* edited by Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt provides a good place to begin.[169] The focus of the book is the preparation of, controversy over, and eventual cancellation of the 1995 National Air and Space Museum's exhibition marking the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war in the Pacific. The book brings together eight essays by a number of well-known American historians. Together, the authors place the exhibit and its cancellation in the context of the larger conflicts over culture, history, national narratives, and scholarship.

In *Telling the Truth about History*, Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob detail the crisis within the modern academic historical profession between the conservative/traditionalists and the social historians/multiculturalists.[170] They describe how the rift between the two groups grew, taking the reader from the Age of Reason to the present day. For the purposes of this thesis, the most interesting and useful aspect of *Telling the Truth about History* was the way in which the authors connected the arguments and debates among professional historians with what goes on in K-12

[169] Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, eds., *History Wars: The "Enola Gay" and Other Battles for the American Past*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996.

[170] Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History*, New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1994.

classrooms across the country. The authors take time to show how the growing divide between the traditionalists and the new social historians trickled down to the primary and secondary classrooms of America. Although it does not focus on the National History Standards Project, the book nevertheless provides some useful background material for understanding the standards movement as well as its supporters and detractors.

Like Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob, Peter N. Stearns is also concerned with the growing divide in humanities education in his book *Meaning Over Memory: Recasting the Teaching of Culture and History*.[171] Stearns provides an informative yet brief sketch of humanities education from the Renaissance to the present. He also delineates succinctly what he sees as the two sides of the current debate: the conservative canonists and the anti-canonists. Readers will no doubt see the two sides Stearns identifies as they read more about the standards and accountability movement in American education. Stearns provides clear but thorough descriptions of the two sides in the ongoing debate.

Given the extraordinary amount of coverage media outlets gave to the debate over national standards in general and the national standards for history specifically, it is somewhat surprising that there has been so little written about how that coverage influenced the debate. No book has yet been written about this phenomenon so far as this author knows. However, Patricia G. Avery and Theresa Johnson explored the relationship between the media and those working for and against history standards in their article "How Newspapers Framed the U.S. History Standards Debate."[172] The

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[171] Peter N. Stearns, *Meaning over Memory: Recasting the Teaching of Culture and History*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993.

[172] Patricia G. Avery and Theresa Johnson, " How Newspapers Framed the U.S. History Standards Debate," *Social Education* 63, no. 4 (May 1999): 220.

authors ably although briefly demonstrated how the media's coverage of the debate actually influenced the direction the debate took at any given moment. They suggest that the media's often biased and fragmented portrayal of the standards controversy made the controversy more heated and long-lasting than it otherwise might have been. Although the authors explore this issue with great insight, a more thorough scholarly work would be beneficial for future research.

As stated earlier, there are few scholars doing research in the history of American education. There remains much work to be done in the history of education in general and the history of social science and humanities education in particular. This essay provides a number of jumping off points from which to begin but no area is exhausted. As more research is done, more questions will be answered and even more questions will be raised. Historians of education, whether they be professional historians or educational professionals, will find this area of research rich with opportunity.

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APPENDIX

Because the teachers interviewed for this thesis are all currently still employed as teachers in the state of Alabama, pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the interviewees. Below is a list of the teachers and brief descriptions of their educational backgrounds and school systems.

Alex – Alex is a twenty-four-year-old, Caucasian male. He holds a Bachelor's degree in secondary social studies education. He has taught for two years. He teaches in a large city in northern Alabama. The city school district employs approximately 1,600 teachers and serves nearly 23,000 students.

Beth – Beth is a twenty-three-year-old, African American female. She holds a Bachelor's degree in secondary social studies education and is currently working on a Master's degree in school counseling. She has taught for two years. She teaches in medium-sized city in eastern Alabama. The city school district employs nearly 350 teachers and serves approximately 5,300 students.

Dan – Dan is a twenty-nine-year-old, African American male. He holds a Bachelor's degree history and a Master's degree in secondary social studies education. He has

taught for six years. He teaches in a large city in northern Alabama. The city school district employs approximately 1,600 teachers and serves nearly 23,000 students.

Jake – Jake is a twenty-six-year-old, Caucasian male. He holds a Bachelor's degree in secondary social studies education and is working on a Master's degree in secondary social studies education. He has taught for three years. He teaches in a predominantly rural county in western Alabama. The county school system employs just over 200 teachers and serves approximately 3,100 students.

Jane – Jane is a forty-seven-year-old, Caucasian female. She holds a Bachelor's degree in secondary social studies education and a second Bachelor's degree in secondary Spanish education. She also holds a Master's degree in secondary social studies education. She has taught for twenty-four years. She teaches in a large, urban county in south-central Alabama. The city school district employs over 2,000 teachers and serves approximately 32,000 students.

Sara – Sara is a twenty-two-year-old, Caucasian female. She holds a Bachelor's degree in secondary social studies education and is working on a Master's degree in educational administration. She has taught for one year. She teaches in a large, urban city in central Alabama. The city school district employs more than 2,000 teachers and serves approximately 3,700 students.

Tom – Tom is a forty-two-year-old, Caucasian male. He holds a Bachelor's degree in secondary social studies education as well as a Master's degree in secondary social studies education. He has taught for twenty years. He teaches in a predominantly rural county in southeastern Alabama. The county school system employs nearly 150 teachers and serves over 2,000 students.