How to Create a Cult: Make-Believe, Contingency, and Complexity in the History Classroom

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RECENTLY, a student enrolled in my upper-level seminar popped his head through my office doorway and asked if we could chat. There was nothing immediately unusual about this request; toward the end of a semester, at least a few students will stop by my office hours to clarify their grade, to ask a question about an approaching exam, or to show me a draft of their final paper. Yet that afternoon, I heard something new. After a few stumbling attempts to express what was bothering him, my student simply blurted out, "I really don't understand the final group project in our First and Second Great Awakenings class." I steeled myself to rehearse the assignment's directions, since I have found that such statements usually mean that the student has not read the assignment prompt. Contrary to my expectation, the student asked, "Why are we *making up* cults in our *history* class?"

The student continued, "How is this even history? Isn't history all about facts?" His questions prompted a momentary pause—not because I was stumped by his query (we had spent a large portion of one class session reviewing the purpose of the assignment), but because this was the second time that day that the topic arose. Earlier, a colleague with whom I was chatting over lunch raised a similarly exasperated worry about the avowed purpose of this assignment. He argued that it seemed to eschew historical content knowledge as a core learning outcome. I suggested to both of my

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interlocutors that using make-believe can be just as pedagogically useful in teaching historical thinking skills as the factually based assignments that they both normally associated with the discipline. Moreover, make-believe might be even better. In this case, my fictitious "cults" forced students to grapple directly with two specific historical thinking skills—contingency and complexity—that are frequently overlooked and untaught in other, more traditional assignments.

I became aware of how poorly I was teaching historical contingency and complexity when I read "What Does it Mean to Think Historically?" by Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke, who argue that there are "five C's of historical thinking": *Change over time*, *Context*, *Causality*, *Contingency*, and *Complexity*. They correctly insist that these Five C's "stand at the heart of the questions historians seek to answer, the arguments we make, and the debates in which we engage," and if explicitly taught in the classroom, they provide students with access to a language and a process for articulating historical thought.[1] In the various classes that I have led throughout the past decade, I realized that I had generated a number of assignments that sought to model the first three of the Five C's pretty well. For example, essay examinations and well-constructed writing prompts can help students adeptly explore change over time, context, and causality. Even a properly written multiple-choice question can require students to use a rudimentary form of causal reasoning. This is not to say that these core historical skills are easy to teach; as Andrews and Burke note, they can be deceptively tricky for students to master, since many people perceive these elements of historical thinking to be "elementary."[2] Yet few students look askance at a teacher who suggests that change over time is a crucial part of the historical method.

Contextualization was harder for me to identify in my assignments. Happily, as Sam Wineburg demonstrates, historical primary source analysis is a continuing exercise in contextualization. Consequently, I came to realize that the majority of my assignments that dealt with reading, summarizing, and analyzing primary sources had been seeking all along to inculcate contextual skills in my students.[3] However, designing effective teaching assignments to address contingency and complexity, the remaining two skills of the Five C's, frustrated me. I have had incredible difficulty teaching students to see the past as a series of choices with unforeseen consequences rather than as a predetermined script of human actions. Moreover, historical complexity, which Andrews and Burke define as "making sense of a messy world that we cannot know directly," can prove problematic for even a seasoned teacher to practice, and thus frequently stymied my novice students who yearned for a simplistic historical narrative of the past.[4] To solve this problem, I turned to make-believe,

and this article explores how I designed, implemented, and assessed my Awakenings seminar assignment in light of my students' understanding of the concepts of historical complexity and contingency.

During the past two decades, a growing body of literature has sought to study what happens in the history classroom. The scholarship of teaching and learning has prompted scholars to think rigorously about "teaching and learning in ways that mirror their traditional research, which is to say, in ways that are systematic, problem based, theoretically grounded, and publicly accountable."[5] One of the telling conclusions reached by this embryonic field is that classroom instructors must find ways to move beyond longstanding approaches to and assumptions about how one learns to think like a historian.[6] Classroom exercises that emphasize content knowledge over critical thinking skills and that claim unbiased, Rankian-style readings of primary sources as authentic and accurate expressions of past events do not replicate the widely practiced, disciplined approaches at the heart of historical scholarship.[7] Rather, these recent scholars have addressed the various cognitive, ontological, and epistemological practices that define what it is that historians should teach students to do.[8] Put differently, this scholarship has sought to encourage teachers to let students engage directly in the chaotic process of "making history."[9]

The Assignment

Drawing upon these broad ideas, I set out to create a final project for my upper-level Awakenings class. The project, which is a much revised version of an assignment I first used in a religious survey course I taught as a graduate student, asked undergraduates to design a fictitious yet historically believable "religious experience" and to locate it within the context of the Second Great Awakening.[10] The course is generally an extended rumination upon William McLoughlin's contention that "awakenings…are the results, not of depressions, wars, or epidemics, but of critical disjunctions in our self-understanding. They are…profound cultural transformations affecting all Americans and extending over a generation or more."[11] Consequently, the course seeks to pursue how the First and Second Great Awakenings and the intervening period reflected, magnified, challenged, and even directed the "profound cultural transformations" that helped to contextualize them.

Such context was established through a broad range of reading assignments that explored the history of revivalism, reform, and religious experimentation that took place between 1700 and 1850 in the American colonies and nation. During the second half of the semester, students read five monographs dealing with both mainline and emerging religious

experiences in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Two of these readings focused on changes that mainline churches experienced, tracing how leaders and church members grappled with democratization, the growth of the popular press, and the evangelical challenge to the definition of public and private space.[12] Students also explored three other examples that concerned more idiosyncratic religious experimentation. They encountered a monograph about prophetesses in the early Republic; a history of the growth of the Shakers, the Oneida community, and the Mormons; and, of course, a story of Matthias the Prophet.[13] In each case, students were asked to answer three questions:

1. How did these religious groups organize themselves, and why did their leaders make the choices that they did?

2. How did these religious groups seek to recruit new members, and why might these groups be appealing to such members?

3. In what ways did the religious message(s) promoted by each of the groups speak to larger cultural, economic, political, and/or social issues of the day (such as Jacksonian democracy, the cult of "true womanhood," market capitalism, racial ideologies, etc.)?

This routinized approach was meant to help students think through the foundational questions that they would need to answer when they began to build their own religious societies.

To prepare them for this project, I assigned students a number of more traditional assignments earlier in the semester to ensure that they were familiar with basic historical methods. Students completed two five-page papers that dealt with evaluating historical arguments and analyzing primary materials. They were also assigned a traditional research paper of primary sources on a topic of their own choosing. My goal was that these other assignments would work as initial forays into the types of disciplinary historical skills my students would need to use for their final project. To create believable make-believe, students had to ground their creations in various appropriate historical contexts. They needed to understand how historians construct arguments and narratives in order to understand the form and function of the "historical" story they would have to tell about their religious group. Students had to think about the structure of evidence, the limits of research, and the role of bias in order to craft "legitimate" primary source material that revealed the contours and workings of their religious group. In essence, my hope was that they would use these historical skills with which they were familiar, given the years they had already spent in college, to navigate my unfamiliarly structured capstone assignment.

The course culminated in our final project, which I somewhat cavalierly called "Create a Cult."[14] Students opted into teams of three participants,

and I charged them to work cooperatively to produce a series of writing assignments that addressed different facets of their invented religious experience.[15] I distributed the cult assignment at the beginning of our last unit on the Second Great Awakening. While the assignment sheet discussed the form of each written and oral component that students would have to complete (reviewed below), it intentionally left the details of the content of the assignment vague. I explained to students that the project placed a specific responsibility on them to deduce the general character that religious experiences took in the Second Great Awakening. The assignment sheet made no mention of democratic, charismatic leadership; challenges to familial, gendered, or social structures; ideas about pre- versus post-millennial Christianity; or any of the other commonalities that existed across early nineteenth-century religious groups. Rather, the sheet explained to students that if they hoped to be successful in creating an imagined yet believable religious group, they were going to have to work diligently at identifying useful grounding contexts that appeared in the various readings assigned throughout the semester.

To accomplish this goal, student groups were first asked to revisit the various religious experiences we had already studied in class. Their initial task was to draw up a list of key *people*, *ideas*, and *contexts*, along with *choices* that members of each historical group made that resulted in some outcome the group experienced (*causality*). For instance, most groups noted in their list of contexts the importance of geography and place to at least the temporary success of an emerging religious movement, such as the "Burned-over District" in western New York.[16] Under the category of choices, some groups noted Brigham Young's decision to move his group westward (as opposed to northward, eastward, or southward) in order to find a safe living space for the Mormons, while other groups discussed Elijah Pierson's seemingly random decision to hire Isabella Van Wegenen as his servant, which later resulted in one of our best sources for information on the Matthias cult's inner workings.[17]

After we workshopped the different groups' results during one class period in order to identify a master list of broad parameters that defined how religious groups behaved in the nineteenth century, I then asked each group to sketch out a broad narrative that would constitute the core story for their fictive religious group. The goal for this narrative was to use the broad structuring patterns that students had identified as the basis for how their invented group would act. Students first worked independently to brainstorm ideas about their fictive cult and then presented their work to their small group, which was free to use as much or as little of each group members' contributions as it wanted. Finally, small groups prepared to meet with me by creating a working précis that included a

basic biography of their made-up religious group, a list of choices they had debated in constructing the biography, and rationales that explained their decisions.

After our individual meetings, in which we reviewed the strengths and potential pitfalls of their proposal, I gave students their final assignment. I asked each group to:

1. Craft a narrative tracing the rise and possible fall of your invented group and present it as if it were an encyclopedic entry (such as in Wikipedia);[18]

2. Produce a "historical" analysis of the features of your cult by analyzing the contexts and causalities that shaped the religious group's experiences (mainly by comparing your group to other groups we have studied this semester);

3. Design fictive but believable primary source materials related to the inner workings, beliefs, or actions of the made-up religion;

4. Write a paper tracing the role that historical contingency and complexity played in both the production of your final project and in the supposed history that was created;

5. Invent, for the fun of it, publicity materials for your cult (You are allowed to use contemporary forms of technology and social media instead of having to fashion realistic recreations of the early nineteenth-century press. However, you still need to craft media that would be believably fashioned by your creation; if your religious group adopted a cloistered lifestyle, they would have difficulty explaining an extensive YouTube video presence).

Finally, each group prepared a fifteen- to twenty-minute presentation that they would make to the class during the course's final days that outlined the work that they had done. During their presentation, groups were exhorted to "convert" their fellow classmates and to convince them to join their made-up religious group. Aside from creating a few memorable antics by group members who took this charge very seriously (the student group who wanted to create a nudist cult had some particularly creative ideas on this matter), these "conversions" had a useful purpose in our class debriefings of the projects. I would encourage students to begin their analysis of one another's work by articulating why they thought they might or might not be interested in joining each group and to explain their choice not only from their twenty-first-century vantage point, but also by imagining the appeal this group would have had to a nineteenth-century version of themselves. From that point forward, students seemed more comfortable giving peer critiques that were grounded in the evidence of the course, as opposed to their own personal opinions.

Pedagogical Platform

In designing this project, I relied upon a variety of insights offered by different scholars of teaching and learning. My first structuring element—that I needed to find ways to allow students to create and play in history rather than simply to regurgitate it—arose from studies produced by Sam Wineburg and Lendol Calder. Both scholars stress that a strong focus on the analysis of evidence is crucial to a student-centered learning experience. Wineburg insists that "historical thinking" is an "unnatural act" and that students, when confronted with a historical question or piece of evidence, need a substantial amount of scaffolded guidance to produce accurate historical analyses.[19] Consequently, I designed the incremental and repetitive steps I outlined above to move students from encountering evidence and understanding it to analyzing it for broad and applicable patterns useful for their own work. Alternately, Calder suggests that historians adopt an "uncoverage" approach to teaching students history; rather than offering a complete coverage of all facets of a topic, instructors should expose students to "the linchpin ideas of historical inquiry that are not obvious or easily comprehended; the inquiries, arguments, assumptions, and points of view that make knowledge what it is for practitioners of our discipline," which should permit students to use these "linchpin ideas" in other contexts.[20] In Calder's analysis, the goal of a student-centered and student-directed learning process in history is to create a setting where students can interrogate historical thinking and content for themselves, which means that instructors must design ways for students to take control of their assignments and their classroom.[21] In the case of my assignment, Calder's proposition led me to the idea of letting students affect the shape of all submitted final projects. The master list of identified parameters that we collectively created in class, rather than a list of parameters that I had generated and distributed, became the foundation on which they had to create their cult, thus forcing them to do the work of uncovering the linchpin ideas in the history we had studied.[22]

A different insight arose from my reading of other scholars concerned with the classroom experience. Research into the practice of historical role-playing helped me both to articulate the structure of my assignment and to differentiate my assignment's overall goals from those of role-play. Role-play certainly bears many similarities to my excursion into make-believe. A good role-play assignment should use "disagreement" or "competition" as its structuring motif so that students will interrogate "a problem with reasonable alternative solutions" and will produce arguments to convince "decision-makers" to adopt possible counterfactual alternatives.[23] Notably, as scholars point out, role-playing should not be fully scripted, since it is

often the unscripted divergences that permit students "to come up with unusual perspectives on the debates that could not have been predicted."[24] Yet, as many who have conducted role-playing in their classrooms know, these serendipitous learning experiences are often beside the point. Role-playing is an activity that should reward students with a better grasp of historical skills other than contingency. A well-designed role-play places students into pre-defined situations (often, the more highly defined, the better), with the goal of allowing students to simulate a historical narrative established by a text or event. Role-play should encourage a great degree of historical accuracy. As students wander from accurate representations of their preparatory background texts and information, as they are wont to do, instructors usually must guide the role-play back onto the solid ground of the evidence that students have read. This is frequently necessary because, as Eve Kornfeld describes:

> The debate serves as both a review of familiar material and an opportunity to juxtapose a wide variety of readings and perspectives directly for the first time. For many students, who simply 'get through the reading' from week to week and seldom make connections between readings and lectures, this will be the first realization that historical figures (and historians) are responding to shared situations and to each other."[25]

Put more concretely, when I ask my introductory history students to role-play the 1787-1788 debate regarding the adoption of the U.S. Constitution, my goal is not to help them to imagine alternative governing structures that delegates could have proposed, but rather to understand the one that they did. Discussions of contingency could arise, but usually, such a skill lies dormant in the face of other pressing needs.

Yet, with my Awakenings project, I can often get different results. By broadening the context of the assignment to encapsulate the entire Second Great Awakening, a movement that arguably could be dated as lasting forty years, I allow my students the flexibility to invest themselves creatively into a wide assortment of approaches to the material (including those that I might have excluded from the course for various reasons, usually time limitations).[26] In the two iterations of this assignment that I have used over the past four years, I have received a number of interesting projects.[27] For instance, students have imagined a new outbreak of Arminianism, the rise of a Christianized Native American prophet seeking to "return" to more indigenous traditions, the blending (unsuccessfully) of a radically stringent evangelicalism with a "pure" commitment to Jacksonian democracy, and the elevation of the family to a sacred, anthropomorphized projection of the divine—all of which were well-grounded in the various contexts of the course. Admittedly, not every student project is successful (a group that was led by a Farsi-speaking squirrel and one that worshipped Peter

Rabbit come immediately to mind), but usually a problematic submission is the exception and not the rule.

Assessment Design

Developing an assessment protocol and the tools I would use to explore my students' learning took a great deal of time and are, in many ways, still in process as I prepare to teach the class again next year. Like with the assignment design, scholars of teaching and learning provided me with a number of useful approaches to imagining how to assess my goals for the class. I came to recognize that my ultimate end was to examine my students' "cognitive habits" or the "cognitive architecture behind a given response—the thought patterns, beliefs, misconceptions, and frameworks that students bring to instruction and that influence (and often determine) what they take from it."[28] While such an outcome might usefully benefit from a quantitative approach to assessment, I opted to use a series of qualitative measures, comfortable as I am in "the kinds of fuzzy logic" historians use all the time in their research and crafting of historical narratives of the past.[29] This insight led me to devise two outcomes for the assignment: 1) Students will demonstrate an understanding of various ways that emerging religious groups during the Second Great Awakening reflected the political, social, and cultural transformations taking place at that time; and 2) Students will articulate a clear conception of the ways that historical contingency and complexity operate.

Assessing their content knowledge and their understanding of the contexts of the Awakening proved to be the easy part. In order to complete their "historical essay" (part two of the assignment, discussed above), students had to draw extensively on their readings and class discussions. Specifically, they had to identify how their creation fit within the broad categories of *people*, *ideas*, *contexts*, and *choices* that our class had compiled throughout the semester. To do this, they had to demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the course's recurring themes, such as democratization, public and private sphere ideology, and evangelicalism. Generally, they did this as well as if I had simply assigned them a traditional synthetic essay on the five books we had read, though, as I'll discuss below, students did report a greater interest in the material since they believed that their reading served a more concrete purpose than simply to prepare them for another exam.

What to do with the made-up elements of the assignment (parts one, three, and four) and how these elements could help me to gauge their understanding of complexity and contingency was harder to figure out.[30] I approached my students' understanding of complexity by analyzing the

fictitious primary sources that they crafted (part three). As Andrews and Burke note, historical complexity seeks to promote an idea about a past that is fluid, contested, and messy. One hopes that students can eventually escape from simplistic narratives of monolithic institutions, ideas, and identities that "obscure our ability to understand the past on its own terms" and see it for what it is and was.[31] As Stéphane Lévesque explains, this requires that students approach the past as a "foreign country," but also as an exemplification of the "common humanity" that exists between those living in the past and the present.[32] Thus, I suggested to my students that in creating the documents that could have been left by those from the past, they needed to think about how such documents might be situated in and arise from a foreign, yet analogous, world.

I judged my students' ability to grasp the idea of historical complexity and the potential possibilities and constraints available in how such sources might have been created by examining the range of sources that they submitted. Students had to consider the ways in which sources could be shaped by bias, form, authorial voice, and historical period, and they were encouraged to remember that sources could and should be contradictory. For instance, one might suspect that sources authored by supporters and opponents of a religious group would discuss the actions of that group differently. Alternatively, the student group that imagined a Christian Cherokee prophet seeking to lead a religious revival among his people in the late 1820s had to reckon with the internal divisions that the prophet would unleash among the Cherokee as well as how the American government might respond. Or that the diary of wife whose husband had brought her against her will to live in a religious compound might reveal *hints* of her dissatisfaction, but would probably never offer a full-throated rant about her miserable life. In essence, students had to consider how historians read beneath a source, and then they had to work backwards in creating a source that a contemporary historian could use to identify important information about their group, all the while remembering the different ways conflicting sources could present the same idea.

I examined my students' grasp of contingency through the portion of their writing assignment that dealt explicitly with their understanding of that concept (part four). In designing this portion of their project, I used insights offered by the "writing-to-learn" movement, which suggests that students should be given repeated chances to reflect upon and write about what it is they are learning in the college classroom.[33] Admittedly, such activities are frequently treated not as a final formal writing product, but as a low-stakes classroom exercise—which I did not do here, since I had students include their writings in their final submissions. However, I did minimize the percentage that the assignment would count for in

the overall grade to encourage students to treat the exercise as reflective rather than as performance-based. Obviously, such work should be used carefully, as a student's self-reported learning may not accurately reflect what a student actually did or did not learn, but rather what they believed (or wanted their instructor to believe) that they learned. However, such assignments can provide one axis of evidence that can be useful in gauging student learning.

My assessments of my students' learning of complexity and contingency showed a promising start for their understanding of these difficult concepts. Of the twelve student projects submitted in the two years I have been using this version of the assignment, nine groups were able to produce sources that showed some level of contradiction and contrast among the different sources they created. Seven groups were able to articulate how individual and historical biases could have shaped the documents they produced (thinking through issues of audience, education levels, personal biographies, and the like), and a few were very good at incorporating information into their evidence that might reveal more than an original author intended. Alternatively, though, only one group was able to differentiate their group from other evangelical groups we have studied, while most simply amalgamated all Christians together. Additionally, most groups yearned to avoid confronting the realities of race and power in antebellum America unless otherwise prompted by me during our meetings related to the project. In their reflections on contingency, students usually reported a broad understanding of the idea of historical contingency, though all too frequently, possibly as a result of my assignment design, they treated the words "contingency" and "choice" as simple synonyms. Most essays usually just rehearsed the different choices made by a leader of the religious group and discussed alternatives that might have existed to the option that was picked ("She moved to the country, but she could have moved to the city, which would have given the cult a more urban character."; "He read Locke, but he could have read Hobbes, which would have left him with a very different idea on mankind."). Certainly, I am happy that students proposed alternatives for the choice that they claimed their leader made, but it is clear that I need to help students see how a choice does not always exist as a stark dichotomy. Additionally, I should teach students to imagine a more chaotic form of contingency. Since an individual's decision to act one way or another is not always the main causal factor in every choice, I should find ways to help students to separate the idea of choice from that of agency.

Student reviews of the project were somewhat mixed. Some students were uncomfortable with group or creative work, though one complaint did acknowledge that the assignment "made us think and research about

the culture during that time period" better than a final exam. Proponents of the exercise found the project "more enjoyable" than a high-stakes exam, and most students acknowledged that the project led them to think more deeply about the material we read (particularly when we were actually reading it) rather than spending time with a monograph during a last-minute cram session.

Conclusion

In the end, I acknowledge that there are problems with using make-believe in a history classroom. For instance, I am knowingly foregoing an opportunity to have students analyze legitimate primary material—a skill with which they need as much practice as possible. My assignment also forgives a certain lack of content knowledge, since the project asks students to engage with broader historical patterns more than with specific historical details. Moreover, there remain problems with how I can effectively assess students' understanding of contingency. It could be helpful to implement an exercise similar to that which Lendol Calder describes elsewhere. He used "think alouds" conducted at the beginning and the end of the semester as a way to assess whether students' historical reasoning skills had improved through the work they did in his class. I might devise a similarly broad exercise in which I have students think through how historical contingency and complexity relate to a group of primary documents. The exercise would be given to a select group of students before and after the assignment as a way to see if they could discuss these ideas in a clearer manner by the end of the course.[34]

However, I would argue that my flight into fantasy does pay some dividends. First, the assignment explicitly asks students to link narrative and analysis, demonstrating that the two are not mutually exclusive.[35] Aside from thinking about the ways in which historians tell stories, students also need to consider how a story can be revealed through the primary materials that historians use. In doing so, I would suggest that they are forced to practice some crucial historical skills. While I am interested in how my project can help students reckon with contingency and complexity, the assignment does require students to put into practice their understandings of causality and contextualization in order to craft a believable religious group. Moreover, my assignment design foregrounds complexity and contingency in ways that many students report not having seen in other classes. For students to complete their project, they have to consider the many choices that their religious group would have had to ponder, and they have to assess how these choices allowed for and prevented other possibilities. Students have to consider alternatives, and they can come to

appreciate the ways in which decisions and outcomes are not foreordained. Moreover, students directly engage with the complex messiness of a well-done project. Hypocritical decisions, mislaid plans, character flaws, and, at times, outright confusion all appeared in the historical religious groups we had studied. A make-believe experience that doesn't have its own elements of messiness is hardly believable history.

Recently, T. Mills Kelly challenged historians to think seriously about the intersection of authenticity and originality in the classroom. Students, Kelly suggests, are heralding a fundamental shift in the use of historical evidence and of knowledge production. He argues that they value the idea of "authentic" historical representation over that of a factually accurate one, and, consequently, it is to historians' peril to ignore this current "jagged landscape of history" that surrounds us.[36] Engaging with students' perceptions of authenticity and of what he calls "remixed history," Kelly concludes, may help us to involve our students more deeply in historical thinking, and I am hopeful that my assignment can aid my students do just that. By allowing students to explore (and, admittedly, to cross) the boundaries of a factual historical experience, I am optimistic that I am helping them to become slightly better historians, and in doing so, gain a better appreciation of those "factually accurate" representations of which they claim to be unimpressed. They have to practice historical skills in an arena divorced from memorizing content, which I would insist allows them to understand the form and function of these skills more explicitly. They have to reckon with what causality, complexity, or contingency really are, and they need to explicate exactly what is needed in order to use these skills effectively. My hope is that this experience will better prepare them to return to history classes that expect them to utilize these skills in more traditional ways. Or, of course, I might just be living in the realm of make-believe.

Notes

I extend my deepest thanks to Susan Larkin, Eric Mazur, Daniel Margolies, Lendol Calder, Robert Townsend, and the anonymous reviewers of *The History Teacher* for their useful suggestions on improving this assignment and article.

1. Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke, "What Does it Mean to Think Historically?" *Perspectives on History* 45, no. 1 (January 2007), <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2007/0701/0701tea2.cfm>. Alternatively, Stéphane Lévesque argues that historical thinking entails grappling with five somewhat different ideas: 1) historical significance, 2) continuity and change, 3) progress and decline, 4) evidence, and

5) historical empathy in *Thinking Historically: Educating Students for the Twenty-First Century* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 37. Both studies have proven useful in helping me to define historical thinking, and in this article, I will treat contingency, complexity, and empathy similarly, as all three authors define these skills in light of comparable learning outcomes. For a different and arguably more comprehensive list of what "thinking historically" might entail, see Alan Booth and Paul Hyland, eds., *The Practice of University History Teaching* (Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 2000), 6-8.

2. Andrews and Burke. See also Scott M. Waring, "Escaping Myopia: Teaching Students about Historical Causality," *The History Teacher* 43, no. 2 (February 2010): 283-288.

3. Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001), 17-22, 89-112.

4. Andrews and Burke.

5. Lendol Calder, William W. Cutler III, and T. Mills Kelly, "History Lessons: Historians and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning," in *Disciplinary Styles in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, ed. Mary Taylor Huber and Sherwyn Morreale (Washington, D.C.: American Association for Higher Education and The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2002), 46.

6. An excellent starting point to this literature is David Pace, "The Amateur in the Operating Room: History and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning," *American Historical Review* 109, no. 4 (October 2004): 1171-1192. For a more practical approach on how to implement insights from the scholarship of teaching and learning into one's teaching, see Joan Middendorf and David Pace, "Decoding the Disciplines: A Model for Helping Students Learn Disciplinary Ways of Thinking" and David Pace, "Decoding the Reading of History: An Example of the Process," both in David Pace and Joan Middendorf, eds., *Decoding the Disciplines: Helping Students Learn Disciplinary Ways of Thinking New Directions in Teaching and Learning* 98 (December 2004): 1-12 and 13-21, respectively.

7. For instance, Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts* and Craig E. Nelson, "On the Persistence of Unicorns: The Trade-Off between Content and Critical Thinking Revisited," in *The Social Worlds of Higher Education: A Handbook for Teaching in a New Century*, ed. Bernice Pescosolido and Ronald Aminzade (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1999), 168-184.

8. Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Peter N. Stearns, Peter C. Seixas, Samuel S. Wineburg, eds., *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Lévesque, *Thinking Historically*; Bruce A. VanSledright, *The Challenge of Rethinking History Education: On Practices, Theories, and Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2010); "Thinking Historically in the Classroom," *Perspectives on History* 33, no. 7 (October 1995), < http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/1995/9510/>.

9. For one take on "making history," see T. Mills Kelly, "The History Curriculum in 2023 (Making)," edwired.org, 2 January 2013, <http://edwired.org/2013/01/02/the-history-curriculum-in-2023-making/>.

10. The core of the idea originated from a suggestion made by one of my graduate school instructors, Ronald Walters. I am very thankful to him for sharing it with me. Carl Becker was also useful to my original design. See Carl L. Becker, "What are Historical Facts?" *Western Political Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (September 1955): 327-340.

11. William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 2.

12. Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989) and Monica Najar, *Evangelizing the South: A Social History of Church and State in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

13. Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); and Paul E. Johnson and Sean Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias: A Story of Sex and Salvation in 19th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

14. I am using "cult" here in a very loose sense, and I will be using "cult" throughout the article as a synonym for "religious group" mainly to vary my language. Of course, students in the course are exposed to scholarly analyses of actual cult structures, and they are free to use this knowledge in designing their own religious group. However, the assignment sheet makes clear that they are not limited to creating only "cults." They can also design a religious group similar to the more mainstream religious groups we had studied. For a useful discussion on the structure of a cult, see Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 171-188.

15. Linda B. Nilson, *Teaching at its Best: A Research-Based Resource for College Instructors*, second ed. (San Francisco, CA: Anker Publishing, 2003), 127-136.

16. The standard history is Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1950).

17. Van Wegenen is better known to most Americans by a different name, but I will not spoil the surprise by revealing it. Johnson and Wilentz, 179.

18. On using Wikipedia in the classroom, see Roy Rosenzweig, "Can History Be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past," *Journal of American History* 93, no. 1 (June 2006): 117-146; Susanna Calkins and Matthew R. Kelley, "Who Writes the Past? Student Perceptions of Wikipedia Knowledge and Credibility in a World History Classroom," *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching* 20, no. 3 (2009): 123-143; Jeremy Boggs, "What? Wikipedia in a History Class?" *Learning and Leading with Technology* 38, no. 4 (December/January 2010-2011): 32-33.

19. Wineburg, 3-24.

20. Lendol Calder, "Uncoverage: Toward a Signature Pedagogy for the History Survey," *Journal of American History* 92, no. 4 (March 2006): 1363.

21. For a more generalized exploration of "uncoverage" and student-directed classrooms, see Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design*, expanded second ed. (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2005).

22. As student projects began to gel, the class returned to this master list at least twice to see if students wanted to revise and add new material to our class map of religious group parameters. However, they were charged with providing specific evidence from our readings to support their additions in order to avoid groups just adding whatever they wanted to the list to make their particular creation acceptable.

23. Clair W. Keller, "Role Playing and Simulation in History Classes," *The History Teacher* 8, no. 4 (August 1975): 574.

24. Kathryn N. McDaniel, "Four Elements of Successful Historical Role-Playing in the Classroom," *The History Teacher* 33, no. 3 (May 2000): 362.

25. Eve Kornfeld, "Representations of History: Role-Playing Debates in College

History Courses," *Perspectives on History* 28, no. 6 (September 1990), <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/1990/9009/9009TEC.cfm>.

26. I'll note that while I have had success with this broader chronological range in this assignment, if the range becomes too broad and students' knowledge of the varied contexts needed for this project become too superficial, I have found make-believe to fail. Richard E. Bond, "Failing Lessons: Tales of Disastrous Assignments," *Perspectives on History* 51, no. 1 (January 2013), <http://www.historians.org/Perspectives/issues/2013/1301/Failing-Lessons-Tales-of-Disastrous-Assignments.cfm>.

27. As I was not able to secure every group members' permission before I wrote this article, I plan to keep my discussion of individual student work as broad as possible, without revealing individual details about their projects.

28. Stearns, Seixas, and Wineburg, 4.

29. Calder, Cutler, and Kelly, 61.

30. A useful starting point was Martin Bunzl, who argues that counterfactuals can be ably used and graded in the history classroom so long as they "can be grounded…[in at least one of] three bases: laws, rationality, and causal analysis." Martin Bunzl, "Counterfactual History: A User's Guide," *American Historical Review* 109, no. 3 (June 2004): 845.

31. Andrews and Burke.

32. Lévesque, 159

33. Nilson, 141.

34. Lendol Calder, "Cognitive Habits: Think Alouds," web page supplementing "Uncoverage," <http://www.journalofamericanhistory.org/textbooks/2006/calder/ev_think.html>.

35. Charles L. Newhall, "Witnessing Historical Thinking: Teaching Students to Construct Historical Narratives," *Common-Place* 12, no. 3 (April 2012), <http://www.common-place.org/vol-12/no-03/school/>.

36. T. Mills Kelly, "'But Mine's Better': Teaching History in a Remix Culture," *The History Teacher* 44, no. 3 (May 2011): 376.