

Forging New Partnerships: Collaboration between University Professors and Classroom Teachers to Improve History Teaching, 1983-2011

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OVER THE PAST HUNDRED YEARS, the opportunities and inclination for collaboration between university historians and K-12 teachers have waxed and waned. For much of the 19th century, the distinction between the two groups of professionals was blurred, with many high school teachers attending meetings of the American Historical Association (AHA), and many university professors lacking doctorates in history.¹ However, starting in the late 19th century, history became increasingly recognized as a specialized field within the university, permanently separating professionals from amateurs.² In 1931, Carl Becker recognized this separation when he warned in his AHA presidential address that, if left to their own devices, historians would “cultivate a species of dry professional arrogance growing out of the thin soil of antiquarian research.”³ Responding to the influx of millions of immigrants, the growth of large cities, and the onset of the Depression, Becker demanded a more pragmatic, socially relevant purpose for historical research than the mere the production of dry monographs. Similarly, many of his generation argued that historians should become more publicly engaged by reaching out to school teachers, museums, national and state archives, and promoting other forms of public history in tune with the progressive

political attitudes of the time.⁴ But as each subsequent generation called for reengagement with the public sphere, universities increasingly demanded scholarly output couched in the traditional forms of specialized research, with a reward system based on “publish or perish.” It is within the context of these conflicting imperatives that the partnerships between history professors and K-12 history teachers have played out over the past century.

Robert Townsend and William Weber have described some of the partnerships that formed between university historians and K-12 teachers before 1975, and then faded away.⁵ In fact, one could argue that these cycles of participation in partnerships by academic historians mirror the progressive and conservative cycles of educational reform history.⁶ During more conservative times, disciplinary history ascends in the K-12 curriculum and historians participate in curriculum and professional development. During progressive times, history often takes a back seat to social education, and historians keep their distance. For example, the conservative-era “Committee of Seven Report” of 1898 laid out an academic curriculum in which all high school students would take several years of history regardless of their college-bound status or academic ability. It was challenged in 1918 by the Progressive-era “Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education,” which laid out a “life adjustment” curriculum of “worthy living” for the masses.⁷ The fact that more and more people, including immigrants, were now attending high school meant that social education and life adjustment education would gradually displace some of the more traditional subject matter. Therefore, many of the history reform projects of the 20th century overlapped with “social studies” projects and were eventually absorbed by them, with the resultant tensions between the two fields erupting periodically.⁸

By the mid-1970s, the collaboration movements between university historians and K-12 teachers that had emerged during the 1960s and early 1970s broke down, as funding declined and predictable conflicts arose in both universities and school districts.⁹ Disputes over the controversial content of certain reform projects, notably, “Man a Course of Study,”¹⁰ left collaboration dead in the water for another decade or so until it was once again re-galvanized by the publication of “A Nation at Risk” (1983).¹¹ This marked the emergence of a conservative reform movement in the mid-1980s, which sought to separate history education from the social studies.¹² With “A Nation at Risk,” the Reagan Administration sounded a clarion call for reform in all the major academic content areas, including history. *America 2000* (1991), *Goals 2000* (1994), and the national standards movement (1991-1998) further called for teaching disciplinary history, not social studies.¹³ The conservative reformers saw social studies

as the enemy of history, and wanted to use their new bully pulpit to position history at center stage in the K-12 curriculum. Indeed, these new reformers were reacting to what they perceived as thirty years of social pandering and the watering-down of curricula by liberal reformers.

Out of this conservative call for reform came a democratic collaboration between K-12 teachers and academic historians that began during the mid-1980s through organizations such as the Bradley Commission on History in the Schools (1987-1990), the National Council for History Education (1990-present), The National History Education Network (1991-2001), the California History-Social Science Project (1989-present), the Advanced Placement World History Development Committee (2002-present), the National Center for History in the Schools (1988-present), and the National History Standards Project (1991-1994). Although ideological disputes over what history content should be taught in the schools, such as the 18-month dispute over the National History Standards during the mid-1990s, threatened to derail this fruitful collaboration at the national level,¹⁴ grass-roots collaboration between college professors and K-12 history teachers quickly resumed, culminating, most notably, with the unprecedented funding of over \$1 billion for the Teaching American History (TAH) grants between 2002 and 2011. Throughout this period, many other history-centered educational reforms were funded as well, both publicly and privately. Unfortunately, in 2010, the TAH Grants program sustained a 61% cut from \$119 million, down to \$46 million in 2011, and then the funding was cancelled altogether, ending an unprecedented era of history reform and school/university partnerships. Sadly, as I write this article on the most recent cycle of reform in history education, it appears that this era of innovation is coming to a close. The TAH grant program is a casualty of the recession and the demise of its champion, Senator Robert Byrd. A description of history collaboration projects is provided in the Appendix and includes the centers and collaborative projects discussed in this article.

Research Methods

Having laid out the context in which these reforms took place, and using the material I gathered in interviews conducted with ten of the key historians who participated in these collaborations over the past twenty-five years, I will now explore the nature of these partnerships from the perspectives of the university participants. I will not present a chronological narrative of these collaborations, but will highlight what I regard as the salient themes that emerged from the interviews. In a follow-up study, I intend to explore these collaborations from the point

Name of Historian	Major Partnership Affiliations	Current Affiliations
Edward Berenson	Executive Director (1990-1993), California History Social Science Project	Professor of History, New York University
Stanley Burstein	Team Leader, National History Standards Project Site Director, California History-Social Science Project, CSU Los Angeles	Emeritus Professor of History, CSU Los Angeles
Ross Dunn	President, World History Association National History Standards Project Director, World History for Us All Project	Emeritus Professor of History, San Diego State University
Kenneth Jackson	President, Bradley Commission on History in the Schools Founding Member, National Council for History Education	Professor of History, Columbia University
Arnita Jones	Executive Director, Organization of American Historians Executive Director, American Historical Association	Past Executive Director, American Historical Association
Gary Nash	Director, National Center for History in the Schools	Emeritus Professor of History, UCLA
Amanda Podany	Executive Director (1993-1997), California History-Social Science Project	Professor of History, Cal Poly Pomona
Theodore Rabb	Member, Bradley Commission on History in the Schools Chair, National Council for History Education	Emeritus Professor of History, Princeton University
Peter Stearns	Member, College Board (1970s) Member, NEH Social History Curriculum (1980s) Member, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (1990s)	Professor of History & Provost, George Mason University
Merry Wiesner- Hanks	Chief Reader, Advanced Placement World History Exam	Professor of History, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

Figure 1: Historians Interviewed. Note: At times, I will name individual historians in my findings. However, I will not provide individual notes for citation since this table of interviewees makes it unnecessary.

Interview Questions for Historians

1. What new collaborative programs have you been involved in during your career?
2. How and why did you get involved in these collaborations?
3. What new types of roles did you play in them?
4. What were your goals in those partnerships and did they change as the partnerships evolved?
5. What issues were the most challenging in these partnerships? How were they resolved?
6. What types of divisions arose between/among the different participating groups?
7. How were those differences resolved?
8. What, if anything, did you learn from K-12 history teachers that has changed your own scholarly research and your own teaching practice?
9. What do you regard as the key documents I should consult for this paper?

Figure 2: Interview questions presented to the ten historians.

of view of the classroom teachers who participated, and compare the two perspectives. Combining the methods of oral history and qualitative research, this paper is woven from ten perspectives from the scores of historians who have played key roles through much of this reform era (See Figure 1 for a list of interviewees). Each of the ten historians was asked the same nine questions (See Figure 2 for the list of questions). The questions were derived from my reading of the literature on the reform of history education since the publication of “A Nation at Risk” and from my own experience as the Assistant Director of the National History Standards Project (1991-1996) and a participant in museum work and many TAH grants. In the interviews I conducted with the participants, I chose to focus on the their personal perspectives, what drew them to the collaborative reform projects, why they stayed involved, and what they thought were the key challenges and successes. Central to my investigation was the question of motivation, and this question would have been difficult, if not impossible, to answer if I had been forced to rely solely on the written record.

Findings

As my questions indicate, I was trying to discover what motivated these historians to engage and remain in these partnerships over much of their careers, what their goals were, how the various partnerships functioned, what the most serious challenges and successes were, and what they had learned from them. What follows is an inside look at the nature of collaborative partnerships through the eyes of the participants, not a chronological history of any particular reform project or an attempt at comprehensive coverage. It is a summary of my findings based on seven themes that emerged during my interviews with professional historians. I expect that new themes will emerge when I interview some of the teachers who also participated in these partnerships, as I plan to do.

Theme #1 The Accidental Reformer

All ten historians came to this K-12 partnership work accidentally. None of them had been trained to work outside of the university, none of them had been trained formally to teach history, and none of them had sought this professional development work independently. Each was tapped by a colleague or stranger to join a particular reform project, based on their successful teaching style, subject-matter expertise, political neutrality, or mere availability, and each agreed to participate without really knowing what their role would be or what they were getting into. Kenneth Jackson, who convened and became President of the Bradley Commission on History and the Schools in 1987 and helped found the National Council for History Education in 1990, said that he had originally refused to undertake the Bradley project until his wife, a school teacher, convinced him of its merit. It was she, Jackson said, who suggested that teachers be ranked equally with historians on the Bradley Commission, a notion that had not occurred to the founders, but was nevertheless embraced immediately by all. Similarly, Gary Nash, when approached by Charlotte Crabtree to be Associate Director of the National Center for History in the Schools (NCHS) in 1988 as she was writing her grant proposal, said jokingly that he agreed partially because Crabtree had reassured him that she was unlikely to get the grant. Twenty-four years later, Nash remains Director of the NCHS, devoting about half of his professional time to partnership work with school teachers.¹⁵ Between 1974 and his retirement in 2006, Theodore Rabb directed a project that brought 12-15 community college instructors to Princeton each year for six-month residencies as graduate students in order to regenerate their passion for history. This partnership with community

college instructors was the only project that was envisioned and initiated by any of the ten historians I interviewed.

Although all of these historians ended up devoting much of their careers to K-12 history education, it was never a conscious career move for any of them, but it was possibly a risky one. Certainly, Amanda Podany took a risk accepting the demanding position of Executive Director of the California History-Social Science Project (CHSSP) while still only an Assistant Professor. All the historians agreed that this sort of work is not valued in the university promotion process, but that they found the work extremely rewarding once they had embarked on it. In fact, for many, it has become a major part of their professional identity and a major part of what they do.

Theme #2

Learning is a Two-Way Street

All ten professors gave similar responses to my question about what, if anything, they had learned from the K-12 teachers over the years. Several said that they threw out their lecture notes as soon as they returned to teaching at the university. They said they needed to change the way they delivered their lectures, by “checking for understanding” and “stopping for questions”—novel concepts before working with K-12 teachers. Others said that they had never used primary sources as a pedagogical tool in their own teaching until after they had worked with K-12 teachers. Now they do so regularly. Some adopted role-play, cooperative learning, and other interactive techniques learned from working with K-12 teachers. Most said that they learned to think about pedagogy and teaching objectives for the first time, and learned to ask themselves the fundamental question about whether something is worth teaching or not from the student’s perspective. Ross Dunn said that he had learned to communicate more effectively with his own students and to define his terms more accurately. Peter Stearns learned from his partnership experiences that college-level historians needed to think more about what students have and have not learned in high schools before preparing their own lectures. Merry Wiesner-Hanks learned the value of creating scoring rubrics from her work as Chief Reader for the Advanced Placement exams, and now she regularly uses rubrics in all her courses, including doctoral-level seminars. Both Wiesner-Hanks and Dunn said that they learned to write their examination questions first and then plan their courses backwards from the end goals. Wiesner-Hanks and Stearns said that their work with K-12 partnerships caused them to switch from Western Civilization to World History as both a field of inquiry and university teaching. The recently developed history Ph.D. program

at Wiesner-Hanks' Wisconsin campus requires students to take a 3-unit course called "Pedagogical Issues in History." Pedagogical courses in Ph.D. programs are highly unusual, and in this case, the requirement was a direct outgrowth of collaborative partnerships. On a different note, Stanley Burstein, team leader for Ancient History (1992-1995) on the National History Standards Project and site director for the California History-Social Science Project at CSU, Los Angeles, said that his partnership work also reinforced in him the unique value of a good lecture, confirming that a "well-told story" still has its place in the K-12 classroom.

The university historians said that they did not feel any professional divide between the K-12 teachers and themselves. The teachers were thirsty for content knowledge and adept at turning the scholarly knowledge into lesson strategies, which the historians later borrowed for their own classrooms. Historians spoke repeatedly of the symbiotic relationship they had established with the K-12 teachers. The only exception to the leveling effects of collaboration was that, occasionally, during the reading sessions for the AP exam, a handful of historians complained about grading exams in assembly-line fashion, sometimes under the direction of school teachers as team leaders. However, according to Wiesner-Hanks, collaboration during the AP readings tends to be the most truly democratic and leveling experience because historians and teachers sit side-by-side at the same table, often with a teacher as lead, obeying the same military regimen, taking the same scheduled breaks, coming up with calibrations together, and reading answers to the same single question for 7.5 hours per day. Wiesner-Hanks said that there is no other collaborative setting in which a 55-year-old male professor might be obliged to listen to what a 30-year-old, female high school teacher says, an interesting role reversal. And year after year, scholars like Jerry Bentley and Craig Lockhart read exams with the teachers who have read their books.

Theme #3:

World History Came of Age during This Era of History Reform, 1983-2010

World history became institutionalized as part of the K-12 curricular canon during the current reform era. Although students had typically studied "world cultures" in junior high schools since the 1950s, during this reform period, proper world history became canonized, partially due to K-12 partnership work. In fact, as many interviewees told me, they brought world history back to their universities as a result of their partnership work. With the exception of Ross Dunn, who singularly discovered world history as a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin and institutionalized it at

San Diego State University in 1974 before working with K-12 teachers, nearly everyone else I talked to said they encountered world history for the first time through K-12 partnerships, not at their universities. This is because the state- and district-level standards being developed for K-12 schools were increasingly incorporating world history as a core part of the history curriculum, and the universities had not yet caught up with world history requirements. They still have not at the writing of this article.

Ross Dunn, a pioneer in this movement, developed a world history textbook during the 1980s, but the world-historical approach he used was too radical for its times, and the textbook was not a commercial success. In the 1990s, his approach became more acceptable, and other world historians wrote the textbooks that were eventually adopted. Dunn and his colleagues take what he calls a “humanocentric” approach to world history, which focuses on human commonalities rather than differences. Dunn is currently working on a textbook that uses this conceptual framework.

Although the California History-Social Science Framework called for three years of world history as early as 1987, as did the Bradley report of the same year, the real breakthroughs came during the 1990s with the work of the Woodrow Wilson Institute on World History at Princeton University and the National History Standards Project. By 2000, the Organization of American Historians and New York University had published the “La Pietra Report,” a seminal document advocating the internationalization of the study of American history.¹⁶ Additionally, in 2002, the first Advanced Placement (AP) exam in world history was administered. By 2009, approximately 300,000 students were taking the AP world history exam nationwide. There is no doubt that K-16 partnerships have played a major role in the canonization of world history in K-12 settings and in some higher education settings—notably community colleges and state universities, but not limited to them. UCLA’s world history course for undergraduates was created in the mid-1990s as a direct result of UCLA historians’ collaboration with K-12 world history teachers in the National Center for History in the Schools and the California History-Social Science Project. Hundreds of universities and community colleges offer world history courses today.

Theme #4:
The Cultural Divide:
The Educational Establishment v. Professional Historians

Stanley Burstein raised this important theme, which was corroborated by many others. State credentialing agencies, school districts, university schools of education, and the Educational Testing Service hold most of the cards when it comes to training teachers and developing curriculum,

instruction, testing, and reform, and they also hold a near monopoly of funding. The educational bureaucracy also has a very different educational agenda from university historians. When historians are invited to participate in partnership and reform efforts, they are usually invited to do so by the federal government or private foundations, not by the educational establishment. On the occasions educational agencies and bureaucracies do invite historians to participate, they assign the historians carefully delineated roles as content experts and fact checkers for textbook adoptions, test questions, curriculum frameworks, credentialing requirements, and other curricular projects. Historians and other disciplinary experts rarely hold much decision-making power in these partnerships, and basically they are called in after the major curricular decisions have already been made. Peter Stearns commented on just how difficult it is for historians to get curricular innovations like social history into schools. “School districts are closed systems, with closed curricula and closed state standards. There is a general reluctance to include historians in developing state-level standards.”

The problem here is that there is a fundamental divide between the educational establishment and academic historians. Part of the divide is simply turf, but most of the divide is over what each group considers important. Credentialing agencies, state boards of education, school districts, and schools of education are concerned mostly with pedagogy and process, while academic historians are concerned primarily with questions of interpretation and content. The educationists’ emphasis on pedagogy derives from the very different environment in which school teachers must work. Public schools and universities serve widely different educational consumers or clients. High school attendance is mandatory and unselective; college attendance is by choice and is often highly selective. Public schools require an emphasis on pedagogical approaches to keep students engaged, but universities do not—or at least they think they do not. As Ross Dunn put it, “there is a ‘disconnect’ between the ideal world of what we historians want intellectually and what school teachers can possibly do. A college professor gets a skewed view of what can be accomplished in the schools.” Peter Stearns said of his work with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) that the biggest problem he encountered was that the NBPTS committees were composed of two groups with completely different educational agendas: educationists and historians. Typically, the educationists fought the historical criteria and the historians fought the civics criteria, each trying to make their own agenda central to the teaching standards. In the end, compromise was achieved as the education professors acknowledged the importance of the history content and the historians acknowledged the need for civics. Stanley Burstein believes that schools are public institutions,

whose main responsibility is to teach citizenship and national identity, not an ideal form of history. He said that this tension between social studies and history would always exist at the partnership level. Although all of the historians I interviewed fully understand these conflicting mandates, they are still concerned that substituting instruction in “citizenship” and the social studies for a discipline-based grounding in history is problematic. However, Kenneth Jackson thinks that historians need to do a better job of accepting what educationists have to offer. “After forty years of collaboration, there is little conversation between historians, education schools, and museums.”

Edward Berenson and Amanda Podany both spoke of this yawning divide as the main challenge they faced as consecutive Executive Directors of the CHSSP. Both labored tirelessly to convince the UC Director of the Subject Matter Projects and the CHSSP board members from the educational establishment that history does not have to be dull; that historical content can be interesting, inquiry-based, and lively; and that it can also accommodate the pedagogical skills that the educationists value.¹⁷ Podany and Berenson were successful in making the case that content and process are not mutually exclusive, mostly because they are both so good at modeling both through their own teaching. However, this cultural divide is clearly the most difficult to overcome at the policy level, and each time historians and educationists get together, this compromise must be renegotiated. Several of the historians made it a point to say that they do not have the same problem when working directly with teachers, who often expressed boredom with the repetitious pedagogical sessions mandated by their districts, and who are eager for the content knowledge that historians and other disciplinary specialists can provide.

At the district level, funding allocated for professional development almost always goes towards sessions devoted to pedagogy, process, and assessment, not towards the development of teachers’ content knowledge. Under the “No Child Left Behind Act” (NCLB), teachers say that expensive consultants are frequently brought in to provide strategies for “gaming” the high-stakes assessments and teaching to the test.¹⁸ Both Gary Nash and Stanley Burstein described the difficulties they had experienced in trying to get a large school district to facilitate teacher participation in the TAH grant programs they were involved in. Apathy was high; turnout was low. Smaller districts were more responsive, but the large districts’ bureaucracy was virtually impenetrable when it came to history education, even when the federal government was providing ample funding. However, Nash said that at the school site level, things are quite different. At the time of the interview, Nash was in his third year heading up a successful “History High School Academy” project at Franklin High School in Highland Park, with

an encouraging principal, highly engaged teachers, and first-generation students heading off for Ivy League colleges instead of dead-end jobs.¹⁹ Nash reflected, “You can’t change the culture of a large urban school district, but you can change the culture at a single high school.” However, this school-based project is funded through the Gilder Lehrman Institute and a TAH grant, not district funding. Thus, history-focused professional development seems to require outside funding, which is difficult to sustain, and nearly impossible to institutionalize within school districts.

Although there are many education professors who bridge this divide between the educational establishment and academic historians—such as Samuel Wineburg, Robert Bain, Peter Seixas, Keith Barton, Linda Levstik, Peter Lee, Denis Shemilt, Hanna Schissler, Bruce VanSledright, Bodo von Borries, Kaat Wils, and Arie Wilschut, and I hope myself—their research funding often comes from the pedagogical side of things.²⁰ Nonetheless, these bridge-builders often present papers at history conferences such as the one that produced this article,²¹ and they research important topics such as historical thinking and learning. Several of the historians thought this emerging field of study is very important and that it should be acknowledged more by their historian-colleagues.

During the ten interviews, four basic components of history teaching emerged, although no single person mentioned all of them. They are: 1) content knowledge, 2) historical thinking and learning, 3) pedagogy or methods of instruction, and 4) curricular materials. Usually, partnerships engage with any two of these components (especially content knowledge and pedagogy), and none of the partnerships discussed during my interviews, as far as I can tell, integrated all four. Historians are regularly asked to assist with development of curricular materials, test items, textbooks, credentialing requirements, and the like, and to provide content knowledge for professional development. However, rarely are they asked to make transparent the historical thinking and analysis that permeates their own work. Historians tell what they know, but not how they know it. Edward Berenson wrote about this omission in his own teaching practice:

Before my involvement with the CHSSP, student evaluations told me that I was a successful teacher. I even won a distinguished teaching award. But I now realize that I was doing too little to model the process of historical inquiry, to show undergraduates what I did in my own research, or better yet, to encourage them to undertake historical inquiry on their own. Only rarely did I make explicit the interpretative and evaluative process that undergirded my lectures, nor did I identify my statements, as often as I should, as parts of an argument or historiographical debate. Having failed to present my own lectures as analysis, I then asked my students to write analytical papers and essay exams. Small wonder that I was usually disappointed with what they turned in.²²

Theme #5: Partnerships Require Lots of Money

Although none of the historians have made much money leading the various reform efforts, especially because partnership work is extremely labor-intensive and often requires constant travel, it emerged from the interviews that all the partnership projects were dependent on substantial funding by federal or state governments or by private foundations to keep them going. Several people mentioned that the American Historical Association, the Organization of American Historians, and the World History Association often found themselves on the periphery of the major K-16 history partnerships and reforms because they simply could not attract the money needed either to initiate or sustain them.²³ Participants need airfare, housing, per diems, stipends, substitute pay, and other expenses that add up very quickly. Edward Berenson, Founding Executive Director of the CHSSP from 1990 to 1993, described the enormous infusion of funds that made possible the scaling up of the CHSSP during 1992 as he worked swiftly to open fifteen new professional development sites across California, all with their own site directors and unique constituencies. Until recently, the TAH grants were largely responsible for keeping most of those sites well-funded, among other projects across the country that would otherwise be moribund, given the current financial meltdown and lack of funds available for professional development in state and district departments of education. The termination of the TAH grants threatens to start a domino effect, which might cause the collapse of many history projects that are dependent on that funding.

All informants agreed that once the grant money or foundation money ran out, it was extremely difficult to sustain partnerships. Amanda Podany, Executive Director of the CHSSP from 1993 to 1997, said her biggest challenge was finding ways to stretch the money to the largest number of teachers. Arnita Jones spoke of financial limitations in her work with the History Teaching Alliance in the 1980s, which morphed into the National History Education Network (NHEN) during the 1990s. Starved of funds, NHEN dissolved in 2001, missing the TAH boost by one year. Gary Nash commented that rarely are these K-16 partnerships institutionalized within school systems, although he recently engaged in a project with Ross Dunn to embed the World History for Us All model curriculum in the Providence Rhode Island School District.²⁴ Sustainability is thus a critical and recurrent problem for partnerships, and institutionalization is especially problematic since textbook adoption cycles and curricular reform cycles at the state level create seismic shifts in the educational environment every seven years or so.

**Theme #6:
NCLB is Bad for History Education**

It is ironic that the Teaching American History legislation and the “No Child Left Behind Act” were both passed in 2002, because the two are completely incompatible. Possibly due to the fallout of September 11, 2001, bipartisan support was available to support the teaching of “traditional American history,” as legislated by the TAH program, and to support the NCLB legislation, which seemed progressive at the time because it was designed to close the achievement gap. Given that NCLB requires 100% proficiency in language arts and mathematics by 2014, including proficiency for recent immigrants and students with disabilities, it is no wonder that politicians came together to support this well-meaning, but poorly conceived bill.

Unfortunately, as we all know, NCLB has had more unintended than intended consequences. All of the historians interviewed talked about the negative effects that NCLB has had on the teaching of history in K-12 schools. In order for schools to meet their strict yearly targets for mathematics and language arts proficiency as set by NCLB, teachers focus on skills instruction in language arts and mathematics instead of on academic subjects such as history, science, the arts, and other untested or marginally tested subjects. A report issued by the Council for Basic Education in 2004 referred to this process as “academic atrophy.”²⁵ Further, teachers are asked to water down curricula so that lessons align with tested factoids and to pace their instruction to “cover” the standards rather than master them. These approaches minimize opportunities for student inquiry or the use of open-ended questions by teachers. Not only is the curriculum narrowed down to skills and rote memorization, but in classes where the standards are actually covered, they are done so in the most superficial and reductionist fashion.²⁶ Kenneth Jackson said that NCLB legislated the passion out of history. In other cases, schools are pushed in the opposite direction to earn points under the NCLB accountability system. Merry Wiesner-Hanks reported that, unfortunately, the AP world history exam is being gamed because of NCLB. Some districts increase the number of students enrolled in AP world history course to earn extra points under NCLB because AP enrollments boost district and school scores. This obviously distorts the whole purpose of an Advanced Placement course, and, often, the teachers who are directed to teach these extra sections by their principals have little background in or inclination for the subject.

It is truly ironic that the reform era that began in 1983 with a call for higher academic standards has been reduced to a pastiche of its original intent. The simultaneous passage of the TAH grant program, the greatest

financial boon that history education has seen, and of the “No Child Left Behind Act,” arguably the most Procrustean educational reform the nation has ever seen, shows how little politicians know (or care) about conflicting mandates. In the meantime, TAH historians have worked tirelessly to inspire teachers who must deal with NCLB and somehow reconcile these conflicting imperatives.

Although historians are dismayed with the situation created by NCLB, they find political advocacy difficult. The National History Coalition, AHA, and OAH have lobbyists who promote history education, but it is groups like the National Council for History Education who have focused on NCLB and taken direct political action.

Theme #7:

The Role of Politics in History Education and Partnerships

My biggest surprise from these interviews was how little anyone said about political controversy or the need for political advocacy in history education, in spite of three questions that were specifically designed to elicit such comments. Due to my personal experience at the epicenter of the National History Standards controversy, and my having read much of the literature about episodic controversies over historical content throughout the 20th century, I thought more historians would have encountered and talked about this topic. People spoke of personal politics, or the politics of working across institutional cultures, or the politics of making the discipline of history central to professional development, but only one person spoke about curriculum controversies or political advocacy. Gary Nash skipped the subject of the history standards controversy altogether, moving on to the uncontroversial work he has been doing and enjoying in recent years. I too will skip the standards controversy, which has been the topic of many books and papers.

The only historians who spoke significantly about advocacy and politics were Theodore Rabb, long-term Chair of the National Council for History Education (NCHE), and Arnita Jones, past Executive Director of the American Historical Association. Jones spoke of the advocacy work she had done for public history during the 1980s. Rabb described NCHE’s political successes and defeats over the past two decades. True to their original mission, during the late 1990s and 2000s, the NCHE leadership lobbied state-by-state to position history at the center of each state’s social studies standards. Alarmed that history was being expelled from the social studies curriculum by many states, NCHE members wrote letters to the Boards of Education in Wisconsin, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and other states. Some of these advocacy efforts were successful, and some were

not. Moreover, Rabb explained that even if you are successful, it does not last. Every seven years, new state frameworks are written: “you win one time, only to lose the next.” State-level advocacy is a never-ending project, requiring constant vigilance.

In addition to its state-level work, in 1996, NCHE organized an event at the Library of Congress, launching a national lobbying campaign to restore history education to its central role in the American classroom. In 2002, NCHE worked with Senator Edward Kennedy’s office to include history in the NCLB legislation, but this effort was unsuccessful because history was considered too controversial a subject. In 2008, NCHE moved its office from Ohio to Maryland to be closer to the political epicenter. Rabb said that the NCHE had often been regarded as a provincial organization and that it needed to be closer to Washington, D.C. if it were to succeed at the national level. Also in 2008, the NCHE awarded Senator Robert Byrd their first annual public service prize, and Senators’ chiefs of staffs were invited to a special “history retreat” in Philadelphia, with David McCullough speaking about the Founders in Carpenters’ Hall. Rabb concluded his interview by asking the rhetorical question, “Can you affect the political decision making of what goes on in the classroom? The state and federal government are in control and you must take this fact on as a reformer. You need high-profile figures to weigh in and get the politicians’ attention.”

Conclusion

The reform era bookended by *A Nation at Risk* and the Teaching American History grants has been one of significant K-16 collaboration, with history at center stage. The results have been positive, up to a point. Historians have helped to write state and national standards, conducted professional development for teachers, written curriculum materials, and served on exam-writing committees. They have headed up history centers and collaborative projects in conjunction with K-12 teachers, advocated for history, developed teacher-friendly Internet sites, and they have generously given their time to these endeavors with little financial or career compensation. The federal government and private foundations have played significant roles initiating and funding projects throughout this entire period, which I am tempted to call “the age of standards.” I truly believe that the number of professional development opportunities for history teachers and the quality of those sessions generally improved during this period, in spite of the damage that has been done by NCLB, and that historians cannot be accused of neglecting public education, as they have been in the past. Arnita Jones said that she believes the TAH

grants and partnerships were transformational for history teachers because teachers have had opportunities to come together as a group and focus on content and intellectual issues instead of remaining isolated in their schools. From my interviews, it has become apparent that the historians, too, have been enriched by these opportunities to engage in lively discussions about content and pedagogy. The partnerships have provided them the opportunity to think in new ways about what they are teaching and how to teach it. Peter Stearns, Ross Dunn, and other interviewees believe the greatest achievement of this era has been the institutionalization of world history in the K-12 curriculum. From my own experience with the National History Standards Project and subsequent developments, I would agree. This has been a truly remarkable success story, and from my understanding of the history of curricular reform, extremely rapid when compared to other curricular reforms over the past century.

But, there is a negative side to this reform period, too. Based on my interviews, I have concluded that the cultural divide between historians and the educational establishment (not teachers) over content and pedagogy has not been bridged, and that it remains the most serious obstacle in the way of substantive, lasting reform. However, I believe that this divide can be bridged by the research that is currently being conducted internationally on historical thinking, which potentially offers common ground on which these two cultures can converge.²⁷ Another common ground might be found in the online collaborations that are popping up on the Internet. For example, the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and the New Media's site at George Mason University is a web-based example of collaboration in response to the needs of university teachers,²⁸ and the World History for Us All site provides a conceptual framework and curriculum for teaching world history in K-12 schools. Perhaps the Internet will become the collaborative space for the future, breaking down barriers between educationists and scholars through an inclusive and democratic understanding of the past, combined with pedagogical strategies that bridge the divide. There is still much work to be done, but with the de-funding of TAH grants and the economic downturn, the prospects for reform through collaboration have dimmed for the foreseeable future.

Notes

1. William A. Weber, "Pioneers in Local School-College Partnerships, 1960-75," and Robert Townsend, "The Price of Professionalization: Losing History Teaching, 1895-

1940,” (both papers presented at the 124th meeting of the American Historical Association, January 7-9, 2010).

2. Lawrence W. Levine, *The Opening of the American Mind: Canons, Culture and History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996); Robert Orrill and Linn Shapiro, “Forum Essay: From Bold Beginnings to an Uncertain Future: The Discipline of History and History Education,” *American Historical Review* 110, no. 3 (June 2005): 55 pars., <<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/110.3/orrill.html>>; and Robert Townsend, “Making History: Scholarship and Professionalization in the Discipline, 1880-1940,” (unpublished doctoral dissertation, George Mason University, 2009).

3. Carl Becker, “Everyman His Own Historian” (Annual Address of the President of the American Historical Association, delivered at Minneapolis, December 29, 1931). From *American Historical Review* 37, no. 2 (January 1932): 221-236. Charles Beard and James Harvey Robinson also thought that history should be used for understanding today’s problems.

4. Ian Tyrrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890-1970* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

5. Townsend’s AHA paper demonstrates that the number of teachers in the American Historical Association, though numerous around 1910, had shrunk greatly by 1940. Scholarly research became the primary focus of historians in the major universities, and organizations such as the National Education Association and the National Council for the Social Studies arose to accommodate professional development needs of high school teachers. However, a commission based in the AHA undertook to rethink the relationships between professional historians and the social studies in the classroom. William Weber’s paper describes two new eras of collaboration between university historians and K-12 teachers that occurred in the 1960 Amherst Project and the History Education project, led by Eugene Asher at Long Beach State College between 1969-1971.

6. Linda Symcox, *Whose History? The Struggle for Standards in American Schools* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002); David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

7. The seven cardinal principles of secondary education were: 1. Health, 2. Command of Fundamental Processes, 3. Worthy Home Membership, 4. Vocation, 5. Civic Education, 6. Worthy Use of Leisure, and 7. Ethical Character. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education. A Report of The Commission on The Reorganization of Secondary Education*, bulletin, 1918, no. 35 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918), <<http://tmh.floonet.net/articles/cardprin.html>>. This report, created only twenty years after the Committee of Seven Report, represented a seismic shift in American educational history away from an academic curriculum and toward a curriculum typified by vocational education and life adjustment skills. Some have argued that this report sounded the death-knell of American public education in which educationists and teachers’ unions seized power from academics. For more about this, see Lawrence A. Cremin, “The Revolution in American Secondary Education, 1893-1918,” *Teachers College Record* 56, no. 6 (March 1955): 307 and Arthur Bestor, *Educational Wastelands: The Retreat from Learning in Our Public Schools* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1953). “The Study of History In The Schools, A Report To The American Historical Association By The Committee of Seven,” *Annual Report of the American Historical Association, 1898*, <<http://www.historians.org/pubs/archives/CommitteeofSeven/ReportCollege.cfm>>.

8. Arthur Bestor, *Educational Wastelands*; Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997); and Linda Symcox, *Whose History?* Perhaps the signal events

marking the transfer of power from historians to educationists and the social studies were in 1937, when the American Historical Association handed over its *History Teacher's Magazine* to the National Council for Social Studies, and again in 1941, when the NCSS took over publication of their joint venture, *Social Education*. Arthur S. Link, "The American Historical Association, 1884-1984" (Annual Address of the President of the American Historical Association, delivered on December 28, 1984). From *American Historical Review* 90, no. 1 (February 1985): 1-17.

9. Weber, "Pioneers in Local School-College Partnerships."

10. Peter B. Dow, *Schoolhouse Politics: Lessons from the Sputnik Era* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991). "Man A Course of Study," an anthropological curriculum designed by Jerome Bruner, demonstrated the power of inquiry-based learning for sixth grade students. It was based on comparing life styles between Americans in the continental U.S. and Native Americans in Alaska. However, similar to the National History Standards Project controversy, Bruner's experience of designing and disseminating the controversial course also taught these innovators hard lessons about the politics of textbook publishing.

11. The National Commission on Excellence in Education, "A Nation At Risk: The Imperative For Educational Reform: A Report to the Nation and The Secretary of Education, United States Department Of Education," (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1983). This clarion call for reform launched the standards movement and a return to the academic disciplines.

12. Lynne V. Cheney, "American Memory: A Report on the Humanities in the Nation's Public Schools" (Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Humanities, 1987); Chester C. Finn Jr., Diane Ravitch, and Robert T. Fancher, *Against Mediocrity: The Humanities in America's High Schools* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1984); E. D. Hirsch Jr., *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987); Diane Ravitch, and Chester C. Finn Jr., *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know? A Report on the First National Assessment of History and Literature* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987). These reformers advocated for the teaching of disciplinary history and blamed progressivism and the social studies movement for what they perceived as the sorry state of the humanities in the schools.

13. *America 2000: Excellence in Education Act*, H.R. 2460, 102nd Congress (Washington, D.C.: October 24, 1991); *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, Public Law 103-227, 103rd Congress, (Washington, D.C.: March 31, 1994).

14. Nash, Crabtree, and Dunn; Symcox.

15. See also Linda Symcox, "Gary Nash: Preeminent Scholar and Committed Educator," *The History Teacher* 42, Special Issue (January 2009).

16. Organization of American Historians and New York University, "La Pietra Report: Project on Internationalizing the Study of American History" (New York: Organization of American Historians, 2000), <<http://www.oah.org/activities/lapietra/>>.

17. Both Podany and Berenson mentioned that "constructivism" was the reform *du jour* in the early 1990s and that, while they had nothing against this pedagogical technique, they had to convince educational administrators that it was not incompatible with history.

18. I hear this all of the time in my graduate seminars. Even school principals and district leaders at times berate these expensive, "quick-fix" workshops that waste everyone's time.

19. "UCLA Puts High Schoolers on Path to Elite Colleges," *UCLA Today*, 10 December 2009, <<http://www.today.ucla.edu/portal/ut/ucla-puts-high-schoolers-on-path-149843.aspx>>.

20. Samuel Wineburg, Robert Bain, Peter Seixas, Keith Barton, Linda Levstik, Peter Lee, Denis Shemilt, Hanna Schissler, Bruce VanSledright, Bodo von Borries, Kaat Wils, and Arie Wilschut are just some of the professors of education nationally who specialize in what constitutes historical thinking and the pedagogy of teaching history.

21. American Historical Association Annual Conference, January 2010.

22. Edward Berenson, "Active Learning in the University Classroom, or What I Learned from Elementary School Teachers," *Perspectives* 34, no. 5 (May 1996). Also see David Pace, "The Amateur in the Operating Room: History and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning," *American Historical Review* 109, no. 4 (October 2004): 61 pars., <<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/109.4/pace.html>>.

23. Arthur Link, in his 1984 Presidential address to the AHA, stated that reports written by the vice-presidents of the AHA Teaching Division "reveal a constant sense of frustration, a feeling of almost despair, because members of that division have wanted to do many things for which there has been no money." Arthur S. Link, "The American Historical Association, 1884-1984" (Annual Address of the President of the American Historical Association, delivered on, December 28, 1984). From the *American Historical Review* 90, no. 1 (February 1985): 1-17.

24. World History for Us All is a web-based curriculum that has two major elements: 1) A logical conceptual framework of guiding ideas, objectives, rationales, themes, and historical periods in world history; and 2) a rich selection of units, lessons, activities, primary documents, and resources that are linked to an overarching conceptual structure. The ongoing project is a national collaboration of K-12 teachers, collegiate instructors, and educational technology specialists. It is a project of San Diego State University in cooperation with the National Center for History in the Schools at UCLA. See <<http://worldhistoryforusall.sdsu.edu>>.

25. The first significant study of how the "No Child Left Behind Act" has influenced instructional time and professional development in key subject areas reveals (unsurprisingly) that schools are spending more time on reading, math, and science, but are squeezing out social studies, civics, geography, languages, and the arts. The study, *Academic Atrophy: The Condition of the Liberal Arts in America's Public Schools*, is based on a survey of more than 1,000 principals in four representative states. Claus von Zastrow, *Academic Atrophy: The Condition of the Liberal Arts in America's Public Schools* (Washington, D.C.: Council for Basic Education, 2004).

26. Indeed, as one who worked on developing the National History Standards, I frequently tell my graduate students in education that I feel very guilty that the standards have become superficial touchstones where coverage is more important than comprehension.

27. Wineburg and others, see note 20.

28. The Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media website can be found at <<http://chnm.gmu.edu/category/teaching-and-learning/>>.

Appendix

Description of History Collaboration Projects

The descriptions below are paraphrased from project statements found on the Internet. Interviewees' names are presented in bold font.

Advanced Placement (AP) World History Development Committee 2002-present

These dedicated educators play a critical role in the preparation of the Course Description and exam for Advanced Placement (AP) World History. They represent a diversity of knowledge and points of view in their fields and, as a group, are the authority when it comes to making subject-matter decisions in the exam-construction process. The AP Development Committees represent a unique collaboration between high school and college educators. **Merry Wiesner-Hanks** is currently the Chief Reader for the program. See <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/members/exam/about_exams/2049.html>.

Bradley Commission on History in the Schools 1987-1990

The Bradley Commission was formed in 1987 in response to concerns regarding the quality and quantity of the history taught in American classrooms. The group was comprised of sixteen members of the history profession, including former presidents of each of the major professional organizations in history and a number of award-winning history teachers. **Kenneth Jackson** was Chair. The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation funded the Commission's work.

The Bradley Commission established two goals: 1) Explore the conditions that contribute to, or impede, the effective teaching of history in American schools, from kindergarten through grade 12; and 2) Make recommendations on the curricular role of history and on how teachers, students, parents, school administrators, university professors, publishers, and boards of education may improve the teaching of history as the core of social studies in the schools.

The Commission's publication, "Building a History Curriculum: Guidelines for Teaching History in Schools" established a rationale for studying history in schools, and made nine recommendations regarding state and local policies. Principally, however, it set forth a consensus of perspectives and ways of "historical thinking" that far transcend factual knowledge. See <http://www.designedinstruction.com/reports/about_bradley_commission.html>.

California History-Social Science Project (CHSSP) 1989-present

The California History-Social Science Project (CHSSP) belongs to a larger network of discipline-specific programs known as the California Subject Matter Projects, administered by the University of California, Office of the President. The CHSSP is a K-16 collaborative

of historians, teachers, and affiliated scholars dedicated to the pursuit of educational excellence in history and social science.

The state organization exists to improve and advocate for history education, promote teacher development, and facilitate leadership opportunities. It is dedicated to increasing the achievement of all students through a research-based approach that focuses on standards-aligned content, historical thinking, and academic literacy. The project seeks to support teachers' professional development through a sustainable community that uses and shares effective practice focusing on student achievement.

The first CHSSP activity began in 1989 at UCLA. Other campus sites arose beginning in 1991. The number of sites grew steadily until the network hit its peak in 2001, when seventeen sites on UC and CSU campuses made up the CHSSP network. **Edward Berenson** and **Amanda Podany** were the first two Executive Directors. **Stanley Burstein** was a Site Director at CSU Los Angeles. See <<http://csmu.ucop.edu/projects/view/chssp/>>.

National Center for History in the Schools (NCHS) 1988-present

The National Center for History in the Schools (NCHS), founded in 1988 with a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, is a nationally known organization that has engaged the talents of scores of classroom teachers and provided history educators across the nation with new historical resources and teaching strategies. NCHS's double mission is 1) to aid the professional development of K-12 history teachers; and 2) to work with teachers to develop curricular materials that will engage students in exciting explorations of United States and World History.

NCHS has worked with funding from the U.S. Department of Education, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the University of California President's Office, and private foundations to further the professional development of history teachers across the country. NCHS is or has been co-partner on five Teaching American History grants. Charlotte Crabtree was the first Director from 1988 to 1992. **Gary Nash** has been Director since 1992. **Ross Dunn** has been Director of World History Projects since 1992. I (Symcox) was the Assistant Director from 1989-1996, and David Vigilante has been the Assistant Director since 1996. See <<http://nchs.ucla.edu>>.

National Council for History Education (NCHE) 1990-present

Once the Bradley Commission had produced its report, **Kenneth Jackson**, along with 189 concerned historians and educators, went on to form the National Council for History Education (NCHE) in 1990. The NCHE runs programs designed to provide intensive, content-rich professional development that combines historical topics and pedagogical techniques to make history come alive for teachers and students.

The NCHE is a membership organization with state councils. All hold annual conferences. It also advocates politically for history education. **Theodore Rabb** was the long-term Chair of the NCHE. See <<http://www.nche.net>>.

National History Education Network (NHEN) 1991-2001

Founded by historian Louis Harlen, the National History Education Network (NHEN) differed somewhat from the other organizations because of its focus on networking and advocacy. At the federal, state, and school board levels, NHEN lobbied on behalf of history teachers.

NHEN was a network of organizations of history teachers joined with leading historical associations and history advocacy groups such as the NCHE and the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). NHEN's goal was to promote, protect, and improve the teaching of history in the schools. Loretta Sullivan Lobes was the Executive Director. See <<http://www.jstor.org/pss/25162799>>.

National History Standards Project (NHSP) 1991-1994

The National History Standards Project (NHSP) was born in a robust climate of bipartisan support for a national program of education reform. The project, administered by the NCHS, sought to develop broad national consensus for what constitutes excellence in the teaching and learning of history in the nation's schools. Developed through a broad-based national consensus-building process, its program involved working toward agreement both on the larger purposes of history in the school curriculum and on the more specific history topics all students should study over twelve years of precollegiate education.

The project became controversial in 1994 when Lynne Cheney criticized it in the *Wall Street Journal*. The controversy lasted eighteen months, constituting perhaps the signal culture war of the 1990s. Charlotte Crabtree was the Director, **Gary Nash** was the Associate Director, and I (Symcox) was the Assistant Director. See <<http://nchs.ucla.edu/standards/>>.

Teaching American History Grants (TAH) 2002-2012

The Teaching American History Grant program (TAH) was a discretionary grant program funded under Title II-C, Subpart 4 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The goal of the program was to support programs that raise student achievement by improving teachers' knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of American history. The program supported competitive grants to local educational agencies.

The purpose of these grants was to promote the teaching of "traditional American history" in elementary and secondary schools as a separate academic subject. Grants were used to improve the quality of history instruction by supporting professional development for teachers. In order to receive a grant, a local educational agency agreed to carry out the proposed activities in partnership with one or more of the following: institutions of higher education, nonprofit history or humanities organizations, libraries, or museums.

Started in 2002, it awarded over \$1 billion in grants in increments of approximately \$1 million to school districts nationwide. It has now been de-funded and terminated. See <<http://www.ed.gov/programs/teachinghistory/>>.

**World History for Us All Project
1999-present**

With an original grant of about \$200,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities and subsequent foundation funding, NCHS has worked to develop an online World History conceptual framework and curriculum for middle and high school teachers. The World History for Us All Project is centered at San Diego State University with **Ross Dunn** serving as Project Director, and Edmund Burke of UC Santa Cruz and David Christian of San Diego State University playing key roles. Teachers also play significant roles in its development. See <<http://worldhistoryforusall.sdsu.edu>>.