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## *Is History on the Way Out of the Schools and Do Historians Care?*

by CHARLES G. SELLERS

CHARLES G. SELLERS, *Professor of History, University of California, Berkeley, is a scholar who is deeply concerned about the teaching of history in our schools and colleges. The following address, which he delivered at the 83rd Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, reflects his dedication to the education of youth and his insight into the "crisis of complacency" facing historians today.*

AN ANTHROPOLOGIST would see this special session on teaching as an institutionalized form of lip service that is highly functional for the tribe of historians. The mere existence of the ritual, whether attended or not, enables the tribesmen to remain serene while continuing to care little and do less about the teaching, or more properly the learning, of history.

But lately the ritual has had to undergo some alteration in order to remain functional. Some few of the tribesmen, venturing into the surrounding jungles, have suffered cultural interaction with the neighboring tribe of school teachers. Those affected by this unsettling experience have begun to mutter that lip service is not enough, and even the Service Center for Teachers of History has failed to stem the disaffection. Consequently, as a new mode of protecting the serenity of the tribe as a whole, the elders have turned over the ritual session on teaching to those deviant tribesmen. It has become an occasion

when the deviants can let off steam without disturbing their fellow tribesmen unduly, and naturally enough the central feature of the ritual has come to be the jeremiad.

These jeremiads have given considerable emotional satisfaction to the Jeremiahs who pronounce them, to their fellow deviants who make up most of the audience on these occasions, and to those few members of the neighboring tribe of school teachers who can be induced to risk the culture shock involved in attendance upon these rites. It is with an eye to this worthy function of the jeremiad that I have devised my title and shaped my opening remarks. I would, if I could, make this a jeremiad to end all jeremiads.

One way to illustrate the impending doom of historical learning in the schools is to recount my experience as a member of the Statewide Social Sciences Study Committee, which was appointed some three years ago by the California State Board of Education. The task of this SSC, as it came to be called, was to draw up a new program for the social studies in the state's schools, kindergarten through the twelfth grade. Of the twenty members of the committee, the chairman was a professor of education; ten members were professors representing the disciplines of anthropology, economics, geography, history, political science, psychology (cognitive processes), sociology, and social psychology; three members were classroom

teachers; and six members were curriculum specialists in the social studies from various California school districts.

History was by far the most strongly represented discipline. Where each of the other disciplines had only a single professorial champion, there were three professors of history, including the vice-chairman of the committee. Other historians—Douglass Adair, Robert Huttenback, Wilson Smith, and Gordon Wright—joined the historian members as a panel to advise the committee on historical matters. Moreover, the executive secretary of the committee and all three of the classroom-teacher members were history teachers with undergraduate majors and graduate work in history, one of them having been a member of my own graduate seminar.

When the committee began its work, six years of the state's prescribed social studies program were devoted almost wholly to history, as follows:

Grade	
4	California history
5	United States history
7	origins of Western Civilization
8	United States history
9	modern European history
11	United States history

Moreover, much history was included in the third-grade study of the local community, in the sixth-grade study of Latin America, in the tenth-grade study of the non-Western world, and in the twelfth-grade study of state and local history and government and problems of democracy.<sup>1</sup>

The committee's proposed new program, by contrast, devotes only two years to specifically historical studies: United States history in the tenth grade; aspects of the history of the modern nation-state in the first half of the eleventh grade; and, in the second half of the eleventh grade, the history of a non-Western society, India, China, or Japan. Historical settings are extensively used elsewhere, but always for the purpose of developing conceptual understandings from the social sciences.<sup>2</sup>

Historians need not be so concerned with this outcome—if it can be effectively implemented, it may actually result in more real historical learning in the

<sup>1</sup> *Social Studies Framework for the Public Schools of California: Prepared by the State Curriculum Commission* (Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1962).

<sup>2</sup> *Report of the Statewide Social Sciences Study Committee to the State Curriculum Commission and the State Board of Education: Proposed K-12 Social Sciences Education Framework*. (mimeo: Sacramento: California State Department of Education, October, 1968).

California schools—but historians should be deeply distributed about some of the reasons for this result. The fact is that virtually no one except the history professors on this large and representative committee saw much value in retaining history in the curriculum at all. Particularly disturbing was the disaffection from history of the teacher members of the committee, all of them outstanding and experienced history teachers with extensive training in history.

#### Weaknesses in Teaching Methods

But most disturbing of all was the difficulty we historians had in coming up with a rationale for history in the schools that was clear and convincing even to ourselves. In the face of the teachers' hard-headed insistence on precision in defining the objectives of the social studies curriculum, we became aware that our heartfelt declamations about "historical wisdom" and "a sense of the past" really didn't convey very much. For the first time in our lives we were compelled to work out painfully and slowly just what these vague generalities meant to us, to define for ourselves as well as for our fellow committeemen just what it was we hoped we had been accomplishing through the history courses we had been offering for years.

Very early in this process it began to dawn on us what the essential problem was. History as taught bore little relation to the objectives we had finally begun to define. Lulled by our sense of the real intellectual values flowing from the specialized historical work in our research, in our graduate seminars, and to some extent in our advanced courses for college history majors, we had remained complacently indifferent to the freshman and sophomore courses that afford the only opportunities for historical learning to the vast majority of students, and to the history courses in the schools that afford the only opportunity for historical learning to the vast majority of the population. Worse, when we had thought about these channels for historical learning at all, we had more or less unconsciously conceived of them in terms of their utility in preparing students for the advanced historical learning that most of them would never undertake.

Once we began to look at these courses, we perceived that they are taught as though the principal objective were to impart a comprehensive factual and chronological mastery of specified blocks of man's historical experience. Implicitly, we perceived, we had shaped these courses, insofar as we had any conscious purpose at all, on the assumption that knowledge is essential to historical thinking and that

we were preparing students for the historical thinking that would presumably occur in more advanced courses. Whenever we were forced to recognize that most of these students would never go on to advanced courses, we had consoled ourselves with the assumption that if they acquired the necessary information, they might utilize it for some historical thinking on their own. We could even congratulate ourselves that we had sought to encourage this process by exposing the students through our lectures to our own distinguished generalizations and interpretations, and through readings to the generalizations and interpretations of other distinguished historians.

But now for the first time our teacher colleagues on the committee were forcing us to confront the question of how much historical thinking and learning had actually gone on among our students in these courses. "The notion that students must *first* be 'given' the facts and then, at some distant time in the future, they will 'think' about them," as one thoughtful observer has phrased what they were telling us, "is both a cover-up and a perversion of pedagogy." These outstanding teachers had learned through their own experience, first as students in our college history courses and then as teachers of history courses in the schools, that "students never seem to reach that magic point where they have enough facts to think." The whole theory, our teacher colleagues kept reminding us, was a perversion of the relationship between facts and thought. "One does not collect facts he does not need, hang on to them, and *then* stumble across the propitious moment to use them," as one educator has put the matter. "One is first perplexed by a problem and *then* makes use of facts to achieve a solution."<sup>3</sup>

No wonder college historians have had so much reason to bewail the factual ignorance of the history students who come to them from the schools. Oscar Handlin has described the situation forcefully.

Few subjects are as much taught as American history; in most states it is doled out repetitively in the fifth and eighth grades of elementary school and again in the last year of high school. Yet a national survey by the *New York Times* some years ago showed the abysmal ignorance that was the product of all this teaching. In fact, every college course of which I know begins from the beginning and takes for granted no previous knowledge of the subject. More than two decades of experience with the best-trained students in the country have convinced me that it would make no difference

whatever if they had never studied American history before they came to college. . . . What is taught simply cannot be equated with what is learned and retained.

But Professor Handlin goes on to point out that young people readily learn things that seem relevant to them, even if such things are not formally taught. He instances "the lad who cannot remember the date of the Spanish-American War or the meaning of 'sixteen to one,' but who can name the pitchers in each game of the World Series of 1948 and can reel off batting averages by the yard. These had significance to him, while dates and monetary ratios did not. When we wish to do so, we learn without teachers, and, sometimes, despite them."<sup>4</sup>

Professor Handlin concludes that historical learning might better be left for college, where presumably its relevance will be apparent to a more select body of students who are intellectually better equipped and motivated. He does not seem to question the efficacy of college history courses.

But the recurrent dialogue on these matters in the California 4SC has gradually forced me to ask whether it is not the invincible complacency of college historians about their own teaching that is the root of the problem. "There is nothing wrong with secondary school education that a substantial change and improvement in college and university teaching would not help," a high school teacher has declared in the *AHA Newsletter*. Ira Marienhoff goes on to ask some questions that I have heard again and again from my teacher colleagues on the 4SC. "Where do secondary school teachers come from? Who have been their models?" College instruction in history "has been atrocious and may be getting worse," he insists, and it is this that has "made secondary school teachers what they are."<sup>5</sup>

### The Complacent College Historian

As I reflect on my own past experience and attitudes, it seems to me that college historians exaggerate the superiority of their freshman-sophomore survey courses to the typical school courses. To be sure some students react with a surprised new commitment to learning when they discover for the first time in these college courses that the communal pieties common in school courses can be punctured, when they discover that historical interpretation is

<sup>4</sup> Oscar Handlin, "Live Students and Dead Education: Why the High School Must Be Revived," *Atlantic* (Sept., 1961), pp. 29-34.

<sup>5</sup> Ira Marienhoff, "A High School Teacher Looks at College Teaching," *AHA Newsletter*, V (April, 1967), pp. 13-16.

<sup>3</sup> S. Samuel Shermis, "Six Myths Which Delude History Teachers," *Phi Delta Kappan* (Sept., 1967), pp. 9-12.

more problematic than they had previously been shown. Nevertheless the college survey course remains essentially committed to the deadening emphasis on comprehensive factual coverage, and even the interpretations are presented as simply more complex facts for students to master passively. The satisfying reactions of some students serve too often to reinforce the college teacher's complacency and to blind him to the fact that the majority of his students remain unawakened.

This complacency tempts the college historian to blame such failures as he recognizes on the school teachers of history. If only, he says to himself, the school teachers of history would take more college history courses—if only they would read more scholarly monographs and journals—if only they could engage in more historical research—if only they would attend more scholarly meetings and keep better abreast of the latest revisionist interpretations—if only, in short, they would be like me and teach like me—then historical learning would flower in classrooms throughout the land.

It is this kind of thinking that has dictated most of the activities of our Service Center for Teachers of History. I would wager a substantial amount that the Center's pamphlets have been found far more useful by graduate students preparing for Ph.D. examinations than by teachers trying to do a more effective job in the classroom. And a majority of the conferences supported by the Center have emphasized new interpretations in various specialized areas of history. Similarly the NDEA Summer Institutes have devoted most of their attention to matters of historical interpretation and have been least successful in helping the teacher increase the effectiveness of historical learning in the classroom.<sup>6</sup>

#### Need for Reassessment of Ideas

More and more clearly we are being told that we are on the wrong track. "I do not think that the Golden Age will arrive when every teacher has had three NDEA history institutes," says one educator. "More factual content, i.e., more of the same, is not the answer." The answer, we are being told, lies in our own teaching. "The teacher whose love of history has supported him through four or five years of generally execrable teaching at the college level," says one of the teachers with whom I have worked on the California 4SC, "is so blinded by his emotional

commitment to the subject that his standard ploy is to employ the same process on his students to which he has been subjected. We may have better instruction in history in the schools by the relatively simple expedient of providing better models in college."<sup>7</sup>

This expedient may not be so simple, but even college historians are beginning to realize that they can best contribute to historical learning in the schools by clarifying their own ideas of the central values of historical learning and then transforming their own teaching so as to realize these values. "The faults in teaching lie deep within the discipline—and not in our surface failures to attend to our responsibilities," says a history professor at an eastern university. "Crudely put, if most serious history is dull, how could most history training fail to be dull?" A professor at an Ivy League institution writes: "I am afraid that most bad history courses in the schools are simply pallid copies of bad courses in colleges. None of us stops often enough to consider what we are trying to do, whether we are doing it successfully, and whether, if successful, what we are doing is worth doing."<sup>8</sup>

It was in the context of considerations such as these that the professional historians on the 4SC were forced into the long overdue task of thinking through what we had been trying to do in our history courses, whether we had been doing it successfully, and if successful, whether it was worth doing. We did finally manage to articulate what seemed at least to us the profound values of historical learning; but in the process we realized that history courses as commonly taught were poorly calculated to realize these values. Therefore we were forced to think about new ways of structuring courses as settings for historical learning.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately we found it almost impossible to communicate our desires and intentions to our school teacher colleagues. So disillusioned were they with the courses we had offered them in college, and so frustrated were they by their years of failure to interest students in similar courses in the schools that they simply could not believe in a "new history" that would be educationally effective.

It was at this point that the contrast between the indifference of historians and the zeal for curricular improvement of social scientists proved most damaging. A "new history," we recognized, would require

<sup>7</sup> Shermis, "Six Myths," *loc. cit.*, p. 11; memorandum to the author.

<sup>8</sup> Personal letters to the author.

<sup>9</sup> *Report of the History Advisory Panel to the Statewide Social Sciences Study Committee* (Sacramento: California State Department of Education, December, 1967).

<sup>6</sup> John M. Thompson, *Teachers, History, and NDEA Institutes, 1965* (American Council of Learned Societies, 1966); James Lea Cate, *The 1965 History Institutes Revisited* (American Council of Learned Societies, 1966).

substantially different kinds of courses, different classroom strategies for learning, radically new kinds of materials to replace the conventional textbook, new ways of learning for prospective teachers, and massive programs to assist established teachers in mastering new approaches to historical learning. In all of these areas the active participation of historical scholars would be required. Most fundamentally, college historians in general would have to rethink their objectives and practices as teachers. They would have to involve themselves more directly in the training of teachers as teachers, and large numbers of them would have to work at developing new types of learning materials with the same seriousness that they worked at scholarly research.

### History and the Social Sciences

Just this sort of thing is already going on in the social sciences. The economists have long since developed a far-flung network of organizations and activities for promoting economics education throughout the country, and economics education is a recognized subdivision of the profession. Operating under the aegis of the respective scholarly associations, the High School Geography Project and the Anthropology Curriculum Study Project have been developing and field testing in classrooms throughout the country elaborate new courses of study and exciting new materials for learning. The first of these materials are now on the market; and at the recent meeting of the American Anthropological Association over a hundred scholars spent most of their time in a series of spontaneously generated sessions devoted to organizing a new Anthropology and Education section of the association and planning its activities. The professional associations in political science and sociology have similar activities underway. In addition, large numbers of social scientists have been involved in the Project Social Studies undertakings, which are developing either school courses in the separate social sciences or entire social science curricula which include history only as providing settings for the elucidation of social science concepts.

By contrast historians can point only to a few volunteers, notably those working at the Carnegie-Mellon University, with the Committee on the Study of History (the "Amherst Project"), and with the Educational Development Corporation. The work that men like Edwin Fenton and Richard H. Brown are doing is little known and less honored by their professional colleagues; and it is ironic indeed that their efforts to awaken the sleeping historical profes-

sion have been seen from the school world as a chauvinistic "crusade to preserve history as a school subject" by the historical profession as a whole. "The sad fact of the matter is that the historical profession has really been guilty of almost total indifference to the world of education, rather than of selfish malevolence," Richard Brown has ruefully replied to this charge. ". . . Far from being interested in 'saving' history, we were convinced that it ought to go by the boards entirely unless ways could be found to make it more pertinent in the growth and development of human beings than the traditional courses have all too often been."<sup>10</sup>

Small wonder, then, that the members of the California 4SC could muster little faith in a "new history" of which few examples exist, for which only a few materials are in prospect, and about which historians show little interest. Small wonder, too, that, completely disillusioned with the "old history," they were disposed to chuck history altogether and to develop a school social studies program entirely out of the all too obviously relevant goodies being proffered by the presentist social sciences. History survived at all in the committee's proposed new program, I fear, not so much because we historians convinced our colleagues of the values of historical learning and of the feasibility of a "new history" as because historians were so heavily represented on the committee and because of the traditional support for history as a means of inculcating patriotism by the public, the legislature, and State Superintendent Rafferty.

### "Clouds" on the History Horizon

The attitudes toward history that found expression in the California committee are widespread in the school world. "The time may come, not more than ten years from now," an official of this Association has warned, "when historians may wake up to discover that what happened to the classics has happened to history." The clouds are piling up on the horizon. In addition to the many curricula that are being constructed exclusively around the presentist social sciences, Donald Oliver and James P. Shaver are getting increasing support for their proposal that the social studies curriculum should consist entirely of the study of public controversies. Oscar Handlin is ready to abandon history altogether below the college level, and that long-time champion of history in

<sup>10</sup> Albert S. Anthony, "The Role of Objectives in the 'New History,'" *SOCIAL EDUCATION*, XXXI (November, 1967), pp. 574-580; Richard H. Brown, "Richard H. Brown Replies," *ibid.*, pp. 584-587.

the social studies, Edgar B. Wesley, has written an article entitled "Let's Abolish History Courses." "Believe me," writes a textbook publisher who is also a devoted member of his local school board, "it is very late indeed. The historians have been sound asleep. . . . Those 'other' disciplines have taken a very militant stand over the past half dozen years, and they are, indeed, going to preempt much of the place formerly occupied by history. I believe this is going to happen no matter what historians say or do over the next several years."<sup>11</sup>

William H. Cartwright suggests that some of these vaticinations may be too alarmist, but we can take cold comfort from the advantages he sees history as having "in the coming struggle among the social sciences for a place in the curricular sun." One of them is nothing more than tradition, "the fact that history has long had an important place in the curriculum." A second is that social studies teachers are better prepared in history than other subjects, but the California experience suggests that this may be a weak reed to lean upon. Finally and most important, Professor Cartwright points to the public support for history, "the curricular requirements established by legislatures and by state and local school boards," and concludes that "The favored place of American history seems to be assured the protection of law."<sup>12</sup>

Are we at last, then, to throw ourselves into the arms of the American Legion and Max Rafferty? "Perhaps this is just as well," sourly comments James P. Shaver, the aforementioned champion of a public-controversy curriculum. "For, contrary to our assumptions, the intense involvement of a citizenry effectively schooled and interested in the analysis of public issues might be too disruptive to our society."<sup>13</sup>

Here ends the jeremiad, for I have some hope that this may be the last occasion when a jeremiad will be appropriate to our situation. If the profession is not by now awakened to the dangers and opportunities for historical learning, the slumberings are beyond the reach of jeremiads; and the time has come for

the awakened to eschew the luxury of jeremiads for the work of educational improvement.

### The "New History"

The task is enormous and many-sided, and the immediate question is where to begin. One obvious answer is to try to create some kind of agency to act for the profession as a whole in stimulating and leading attacks on every aspect of the problem—defining the goals and values of historical learning; developing and evaluating new courses, strategies, and materials consistent with these goals; involving historians and history departments more fully and effectively in the training of prospective teachers; and developing patterns of continuing in-service relationships between college and school teachers of history. Such a proposal was prepared several years ago by the Association's Committee on Teaching; and more recently the Association has joined with the Organization of American Historians and the National Council for the Social Studies to seek funding for a somewhat more elaborately planned School History Projects Board along these lines.

But in a period when private foundations, the National Science Foundation, and the Office of Education have poured millions of dollars into similar enterprises sponsored by the social science disciplines, not even modest financing has been forthcoming for such an effort by the historical profession. The reason, I would suggest, is that our sins of invincibly complacent indifference to problems of history education are catching up with us. The suspicions of self-serving Toryism that historians encountered on the California 4SC are endemic in the educational world. If we would restore historical learning, if we wish to be listened to, we must first demonstrate that we ourselves have begun to be seriously concerned with the problems of history education.

Recently the Office of Education has funded a more circumscribed undertaking for involving historians directly in the training of school history teachers. It is an essential feature of this program that the participants begin by establishing a clear understanding of the objectives of history education, and that they be willing to restructure their teaching in the light of the objectives they have defined.

While this promising enterprise is carried forward by a small but widening circle of participants, the Association's new Committee on University and College Teaching will be pushing forward on the related but even more fundamental front of finding more effective ways to realize the values of historical learn-

<sup>11</sup>Richard H. Brown, "History as Discovery: An Interim Report on the Amherst Project," in Edwin Fenton, *Teaching the New Social Studies in Secondary Schools: An Inductive Approach* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 444; Edgar B. Wesley, "Let's Abolish History Courses," *Phi Delta Kappan* (September, 1967), pp. 3-8; personal letter to the author

<sup>12</sup>William H. Cartwright, "The Future of the Social Studies," *SOCIAL EDUCATION*, XXX (February, 1966), pp. 79-82, 100.

<sup>13</sup>James P. Shaver, "Social Studies: The Need for Redefinition," *SOCIAL EDUCATION*, XXXI (November, 1967), pp. 588-592, 596

ing in the introductory college courses in history. Both in connection with the work of this committee and apart from it we hear of experimental innovations on all sides, at Wisconsin, at Smith, at Berkeley, and at innumerable other places that have not yet come to public notice. If—and the if is a large one—we can take these signs to indicate a seriously growing concern to find better ways to realize the values of historical learning, the day of the jeremiad may truly be past, and the future of history education in both the colleges and the schools may be brighter than we have previously had reason to think.

There remains to be noted one salient fact about this rejuvenation of historical learning. The initiative is coming not from the colleges but from the schools. The prediction of two college teachers who have followed closely the new ferment in school history may yet be borne out: "Perhaps the necessary changes will come only from the pressure created by innovations in the high school." Certainly my own experience with the California 4SC inspired the substantial changes I have made in our introductory United States history course at Berkeley; and the exhilarating response of our students to these changes has induced a group of my Teaching Assistants to offer this year an experimental course pushing the changes still further. Their experiment is heavily influenced by the experimental course at the University of Wisconsin. Such innovations in freshman and sophomore history may in turn force changes in junior and senior history. At any rate, Professor William R. Taylor notes that the students in the experimental course at Wisconsin are already "very discontented with the so-called advanced courses they are now taking."<sup>14</sup>

Hopefully college history teachers and departments in general will begin to think more seriously about what they are trying to accomplish and how they are trying to accomplish it. Ideally college teachers will be ready to learn from their educationally more alert colleagues in the schools; alternatively changes may be forced on them by the students who come to them from innovative schools, students who will no longer sit still for the "old history." In either case, college historians will need to pay close atten-

tion to the "new history" that is developing in the schools.

The "new history" will not be new in its effort to enable students to attain the "historical perspective," the "sense of the past," the "historical wisdom" about which historians have long and too vaguely spoken. What will be newest about it is the directness with which it proceeds from the assumption, as stated by Richard H. Brown, that "the schools are intended primarily to be institutions where students (1) learn, and (2) learn how to learn in order that they may go on learning through life." When we start with this proposition, Professor Brown points out, we are forced "to look at the whole educational process from the point of view of how and what students learn, rather than what we teach them or how we teach it." By starting with this proposition, Professor Brown and his fellow builders of a new history have been led to see that "the student learns best as an active inquirer—by asking questions and pursuing their answers—rather than when he is asked, as an end in itself, to master the answers of others to questions which may be quite irrelevant to him or which he may only dimly understand."<sup>15</sup>

This "discovery learning," as Professor Brown calls it, is not confined to the use of original sources or to a single method of learning. Like the historian, the student "will doubtless learn both inductively and deductively, pursuing his question not only to the original sources but to good books, to reference books such as a text, to the findings of social scientists, to anyone who can tell him something he wants to know, even the teacher." Necessarily abandoning the traditional goal of "coverage," discovery learning instead asks "what the student can be expected to do with the subject in terms of his own development." Through the intensive study of selected episodes the student is invited over and over again "to discover for himself paradox and irony, to confront dilemma, to see that not all problems are solvable, and to appreciate the nature and uses of value judgments, while practicing making them." The hope is that the student, "in trying to explain for himself why particular human beings acted as they did in particular situations, will deepen his own understanding of what it is to be human, that he will come to appreciate man's necessity to act in the midst of uncertainty, to grapple with the moral dimensions of man's behavior, and to comprehend more fully the nobility and frailty of the human condition."

<sup>14</sup> Myron Marty and Jerrald Pfabe, "A Critical Reaction," mimeographed memorandum circulated following the three sessions on secondary school teaching at the 1967 meeting of the Organization of American Historians; William R. Taylor, "The Wisconsin Laboratory Course in American History," *AHA Newsletter*, VI (February, 1968), pp. 10-14.

<sup>15</sup> Richard H. Brown, "Richard H. Brown Replies," *loc. cit.*

"Pursuing these aims," says Professor Brown, "we are beginning, I think, to grapple with the fact that the nature and goals of historical inquiry are subtly but importantly different from those of the sciences and social sciences. . . . We grow steadily more convinced that the tired old history course can be made over in terms of new approaches to learning and that, once made over, it emerges even more importantly than before as a unique discipline which it is important at some places along the curricular way to treat as such." The task, he concludes, is not to

"save" history, but to "save education from losing a dimension which history alone can bring to it."<sup>16</sup>

If college teachers of history can catch the vision of what this kind of "new history" promises, if they can begin to reconsider their own courses in the light of these possibilities, then, but only then, the future of historical learning in the schools and in American society will be secure.

<sup>16</sup> Richard H. Brown, *loc. cit.*

## THE EVOCATIVE MR. SELLERS

Comments by ROBERT L. ZANGRANDO  
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CHARLES SELLERS is one of a small but growing cadre within the historical profession who have engaged themselves in the vital work of history education. Thanks to his experiences and to the energies he has already expended, Sellers can speak with knowledge and feeling—and even with some good-natured humor—about the problems and potential of history instruction.

One would have anticipated that Sellers would approach the topic of history education with a multidimensional focus, and he has not disappointed us. History as a discipline, as a systematic process for gathering, ordering, and evaluating materials from the past, is practiced alike by the research scholar, the classroom instructor (whether in the schools or the colleges), and the student at all stages of his academic life. That process thrusts the investigator into his material in an intimate dialogue, and as he works his way through the dialogue—challenging the evidence, formulating hypotheses, testing conclusions, and shaping interpretations—he functions as humanist and social scientist, as the nature of his topic, the available resources, and the questions he raises all allow. These facets of historical investigation spring to mind in reading Sellers' address, because they move to the fore at his hand or lurk and glimmer, by implication, just beneath the surface of his remarks.

Their assertion lies at the very heart of a necessary definition of history's nature and purposes, for which he appeals.

Sellers has properly noted that the problems of history education do not reside in the schools alone. The pre-college situation is but one of many elements in a constantly evolving and circular interchange that joins the high school teacher and curriculum specialist, the pre-service teacher in-training, the college instructor, and the professors of history and education who launch the next generation of classroom teachers into another phase of the cycle. Schoolmen and their college and university counterparts share mutually in the strengths or weaknesses of history education, as do the students whose intellectual lives they touch and influence. No part of this configuration of personalities and forces functions in isolation, although Sellers has chosen to identify the retardative effects that college and university professors, however unintentionally, have sometimes had upon history instruction, in both immediate and longer range secondary ways, and he has urged his colleagues in higher education to perceive anew their potential as a generative force for enrichment within the history education cycle.

Indications exist, I think, that his message will find a receptive and energetic audience among col-



lege and university historians anxious to infuse history education with new vitality and purpose.

### Effects of Protest Movements

The academic community, especially in an open society, does not operate within a vacuum; it is touched by and responds to public needs and crises. Often this happens slowly and indirectly, but over the past several years domestic and international pressures (stemming, for example, from the civil rights movement, protests for peace, the anti-poverty campaigns, and an increasingly articulate Black Power movement) have induced humanists and social scientists to reappraise their own roles in the society and the functions of their subject matter disciplines in the classroom. For these educators, the confrontations of the mid- and late 1960's can represent as healthy and revivifying a challenge as Sputnik once did for their associates in the physical sciences. Given the necessary level of support by the public at large, scholars and instructors in history will respond just as productively.

What compelling themes and messages have emerged from these protest movements? To begin with, each of them has rejected an unthinking acceptance of the status quo and established patterns. No teacher of history, at any level, should feel uncomfortable with that, for the processes of historical inquiry and reinterpretation have usually profited from a skeptical and impudent handling of the past. The protesters have accused the nation of disregarding the contributions and needs of a significant portion of the community, Black America. The quest for a new Black history has undoubtedly produced tensions among traditionalists, black and white, and posed a series of problems and opportunities for militants; a major upending of a past with which we have grown comfortable is bound to be an unsettling experience—especially when reassessments are forged in an atmosphere of sharp public controversy. Nevertheless, such challenges, when taken seriously and applied to history in the form of fresh questions and an incisive reexamination of evidence, can enliven and strengthen the historical discipline in all its aspects involving research, teaching, and writing about the past. This could well be one of the great legacies of Black history. Moreover, protesters have reproached an affluent America for having ignored the poor, the inarticulate, and the disadvantaged of many kinds; they have denounced customs and procedures whereby other, more well-placed Americans have been allowed to reach life-and-death eco-

nomie and political decisions for the disadvantaged. The cries of "One Man, One Vote," and the condemnation of unchecked authority casually rendering verdicts to which others in the social order must accommodate themselves, have occasioned a general uneasiness with judgments made by "experts" and alleged "peers" alone. It should come as no surprise that inquiry- and discovery-learning, and the manner in which they engage the individual student in a more direct and personalized search for historical truth, have been eagerly seized upon by instructors and students attuned to the potential benefits of participatory involvement in decision making. And who would deny that demands for peace have had their effects upon approaches taken by research scholars and history instructors wrestling anew with issues of conflict resolution from the past? Sharpened by confrontations that often render previously accepted interpretations obsolete if not dysfunctional, and moved by crises that prompt new questions and different answers, history emerges in altered forms to serve the student and citizen in the ever-maturing quest for perspective and identity.

### A Call to Action

All of this, I think, is more than the spirit of a moment. The processes of historical investigation and instruction are so intricately woven about the procedures of inquiry and evaluation, and so much bound up with the vision and purposes of the learner (be he research scholar, instructor, or student), that the challenges to tradition and the impulses to action so apparent throughout the nation cannot help but have a profound effect upon the discipline of history in our lifetime. It is reasonable to believe that this impact, in its many and varied aspects, will benefit history in ways we do not yet imagine.

Mr. Sellers delivered his remarks within the confines of the American Historical Association's annual meeting. His address was far more than a jeremiad. It was a call to action in the midst of action, a set of guidelines designed not to initiate change but to facilitate and direct change that is, thanks to men like Sellers, already underway. It remains for academic organizations, the AHA and the NCSS among them, to accelerate their supportive roles as catalytic agents that can marshal resources, engage willing hands, initiate and implement programs, fashion reward systems sustaining these efforts, and disseminate the results in ever-widening circles to the simultaneous enrichment of history education and the daily life experiences of inquiring citizens in a free society.