“TEACH US THE TRUTH”

The Controversy Over Advanced Placement United States History

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Abstract

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In fall of 2014, the College Board released a new Advanced Placement United States History (APUSH) framework written over seven years by a panel of professional historians. By shifting the focus of the framework from content mastery to critical inquiry, the authors hoped to bring the course more in line with college level expectations. Prominent Conservatives, however, condemned the 2014 framework and accused the College Board of seeking to indoctrinate students with leftist identity politics. Conservative pushback caused the College Board to reevaluate the 2014 framework, resulting in an updated 2015 edition. This caused an angry outpouring from media on the Left accusing the College Board of caving to Conservative pressure and white washing the United State's checkered past. This paper argues that by positioning the new APUSH frameworks in terms of a Liberal-Conservative binary, the media coverage obscured the larger focus in both the 2014 and 2015 frameworks on the importance of

dialogue and critical thinking skills in history classrooms. In contrast to the media portrayal of the new frameworks, this paper asserts that the 2014 and 2015 APUSH editions open the door for students to engage with the complexities of historical invention by presenting students with an understanding of the past as indeterminate and open to dialogue. By positioning the frameworks as promoting either Liberal or Conservative history, the media coverage inhibits effective public discussion and understanding of these reforms.

Keywords: United States History Education, Advanced Placement, Media, Historical Thinking

American cynics, such as those who developed the controversial new Advanced Placement U.S. history course, are aghast at the idea of "teaching patriotism." But what does it really mean to promote patriotism through the study of history? Few Americans would approve of the government indoctrinating students with a particular worldview. However, if teaching the truth about American history inspires patriotism, then that's an entirely different matter.

-Jane Robbins American Principles Project

On August 22nd, 2014 *Fox News* covered the brewing controversy across the nation concerning the new Advanced Placement United States History (APUSH) framework put forth by the College Board. The segment featured Jane Robbins, a Senior Fellow with the conservative American Principles Project, who described the framework as presenting "American history as one long story of groups in conflict" that "does not focus on individuals at all" (Rosen, 2014). Many prominent Conservatives echoed this critique, accusing the College Board of moving away from the historical Truth of American exceptionalism and seeking to indoctrinate students with leftist identity politics. Conservative pushback caused the College Board to reevaluate the 2014 framework, resulting in an updated 2015 edition. This caused an angry outpouring of headlines on the Left exclaiming: "College Board Caves To Conservative Pressure" and "Real history: The College Board tries to sanitize negative events" (Editorial Board, 2015 ; Quinlan 2015). Just as the 2014 framework fueled anger on the Right, after the release of the 2015 edition news and opinion editorials from Progressive sources accused the College Board of succumbing to Conservative pressure by moving away from the historical Truth of American oppression and injustice.

The 2014 and 2015 revisions to the APUSH framework turned into a larger public debate about how to ensure that history education is rooted in objective historical facts rather than present day grievances. The frameworks that catalyzed this public battle over whose facts reflect historical Truth, however, were crafted with the intention of undermining the very notion of a disinterested, universal past. The goal of the 2014 edition, which was written over seven years by

a panel of professional historians, was to bring the exam more in line with historiographical movements in the field reflecting the impact of postmodern critiques. This focus remains central in the 2015 framework. The predominance of the media response to both the 2014 and 2015 APUSH editions, however, does not address what the historians working on these frameworks hoped to accomplish, namely a move from “a laundry list of required content” to a developed set of “parameters for fostering historical understanding of the discipline” (Charap, 2013, p. 32). By ignoring or devaluing this central focus on the processes by which historians actually construct narratives, I argue that media response to the new frameworks inhibits effective public discourse around history education.

Analyzing how the media (mis)characterizes changes in education policy is crucial. The media is one of the main avenues through which the public understands the significance of education reforms and thereby voices their support and concern for said policies. The coverage following the release of the 2014 framework had a significant impact on history education policy discourse. The media reaction characterized the 2014 APUSH framework as containing a liberal bias that ignored historical facts. The controversy led to a spate of resolutions that denounced the College Board and sought to overhaul the 2014 APUSH framework. The Republican National Committee issued a resolution calling the framework a "radically revisionist view of American history that emphasizes negative aspects of our nation's history while omitting or minimizing positive aspects" (Republican National Committee, 2014). Early in 2015, Oklahoma passed House Bill 1380 that sought to defund Advanced Placement US History because of the new framework’s lack of focus on “the free-market economic system and American exceptionalism” (Fisher, 2015). A resolution by the Conservative majority Jefferson County School Board (a suburb of Denver, Colorado) denounced the new framework and proposed creating a committee

to replace it. In response to the perceived Liberal bias of the 2014 APUSH edition, the resolution emphasized that the replacement course should present "factual information accurately and objectively" (Williams, 2014). The resolution stressed that instructional material "should promote citizenship, patriotism, essentials and benefits of the free enterprise system, respect for authority and respect for individual rights" (Williams, 2014). The media narrative simplistically positioned the 2014 framework along political lines, fueling public outcry and this outpouring of resolutions. I argue that by framing the new APUSH frameworks in terms of a Liberal-Conservative binary, the media coverage obscured the larger focus in both the 2014 and 2015 frameworks on the importance of dialogue and critical thinking skills in history classrooms.

Rather than indoctrinate students with one Liberal/Conservative reading of history, the new frameworks seek to help students understand how sources, historians and the larger social context interact to construct different ways of seeing the past. When analyzing the historiographical debates currently taking place, the question, for most contemporary historians, is not whether or not historical work reflects a past reality *as it actually took place*. Rather, the debate is one regarding *the degree* with which historical models can plausibly represent the past. Most historians agree that absolute, transcendent knowledge of the past is impossible. Historical invention involves constructing possible/probable pasts that are *always* open to inspection and debate. The 2015 framework similarly asserts that all historical argumentation is "an interpretation of the past that reflects the historian's best understanding" (p. 100). This understanding, however, is always subject to reevaluation. Written history, the framework asserts, "is always changing, as new information and new ways of looking at the past become available. It is therefore important to understand that all accounts of historical events are

interpretations of those events" (College Board, 2015, p. 100). Interpretation, by its very nature, assumes a degree of indeterminacy that rejects one conception of truth.

As I will illustrate through comparison of the 2014 and 2015 APUSH frameworks in relation to these historiographical trends, the new guidelines conceive of a means to engage the material through contrasting and debating various historical lenses in conjunction with primary sources. This strategy moves toward a conception of meaning produced and altered through continuous dialogue. By contrasting different lenses, students are presented with different ways to approach historical debate and critically analyze primary sources. This is in accordance with historiographical trends that have "shifted away from documentation to interpretation, away from restructuring a chain of events to exploring their significance" (Appleby et al, 1996, p. 1).

Media coverage of the recent frameworks, however, has for the most part ignored this shift to historical understanding (the process of making sense of the past). Whereas the 2014 framework was painted as Leftist revisionist history, the 2015 reworking of the 2014 edition was characterized as the College Board caving to Conservative demands. The two documents, however, both privilege debate and historical understanding over content mastery. It is ironic that the recent frameworks, which attempt to shift focus away from rote memorization to critical inquiry, have become ensnared in an intractable battle over facts. In the following pages I will first give a brief overview of the change in focus of the APUSH exams over time. I will then analyze the ways in which media coverage has moved the debate from how best to teach students American history in a way that encourages critical thinking and dissent to a polarizing battle over Truth that leaves no room for disagreement.

I first noticed this trend when I started following the debate over the 2014 APUSH framework back in September of 2014. In order gain an understanding of whether the opinions

expressed represented the majority of articles responding to the new framework, I started a Google Alert system to notify me of media discourse surrounding the APUSH guidelines. From analysis of the coverage, I found that the positions tended to be based in totalizing meta-narratives of American history. Opinion editorials released after the 2014 and 2015 frameworks leave little room for dialogue and dissent. After the release of the 2014 framework, many Conservatives characterized it as having a liberal bias that neglected the historical Truth of American exceptionalism. After the College Board amended the framework in 2015, liberal commentators accused the course of neglecting to tell the true story of America's history of imperialism and oppression. Commentators from both the Left and Right seemed to agree that history should be objective and free from political bias. The narrative of the past presented in these media articles, whether that of American exceptionalism or American oppression, is assumed to be objective as supported by the facts that corroborate the historical Truth of their account. A failure to accept this version of the past (whichever one it is) as historical Truth is framed in these articles as a moral failure by undermining either America's accomplishments or America's role as oppressor. It is not my goal in this paper to critique the individual narratives of American history presented in these media articles, but rather to critique the authors' framing of these narratives as objective Truth. These appeals to historical objectivity are a means of laying claim to the official narrative of the past. By framing the public debate over the new guidelines in terms of objectivity and historical Truth, the media coverage disregards the nuanced debate among historians by obscuring the contested nature of history.

It is important that issues concerning the content of history courses be discussed in the public sphere regarding the specific historical narratives, sources, and dilemmas with which students will engage. I argue, however, that these discussions become detrimental when they are

based in an antiquated notion of historical Truth that seeks to lay claim to one official memory of the past. After analyzing the assertions made in these media articles, I will turn to the fear imbedded in much of the coverage that letting go of the notion of historical Truth leads to moral relativism. Building off of work in feminist standpoint theory, I argue that accepting uncertainty and the situated nature of historical knowledge is not an acceptance that all interpretations of the past are equally valid. Rather, it is an acceptance that our knowledge is always partial and forever situated. The media narrative that frames the new APUSH editions as either affirming a Liberal or Conservative history thus misses the frameworks' broader goals of cultivating the skills to critically analyze *all* historical narratives.

An Attempt to Bring AP US History in Line with the History Profession

Debates within the historical profession have wrestled with issues about how to defend their narratives, their means of making sense of the past, in light of postmodern assertions regarding the rhetorical and constructed nature not only of historical interpretation, but also of the archives and sources that form the spine of these interpretations. What is the importance of history if it no longer presents us with a plausible reflection of reality, of the world as it was? Although historians vary in their acceptance of postmodern critiques of traditional historical inquiry, most agree that these discussions have been fruitful. Historian Laura Edwards (2011) expresses that these debates have "resulted in a collective examination of the discipline and our relationship, as historians, to our scholarship" (Edwards, 2011). There is now a general consensus in the field of history that rather than recreate "how things actually were," historical narratives present a possible past whose interpretation and significance is never fixed (Ranke, 1909/1956, p. 57). Through the process of professional presentation and review, issues of historical reliability are mediated without ever providing absolute closure. As new evidence and

perspectives enter these debates, established narratives are amended, overhauled or recontextualized.

Engagement with diverse perspectives and narratives challenges us as scholars to consider the internal contradictions as well as to assess the value of our own positions. Such dialogue is indispensible to good scholarship. Although we may take this assertion for granted as part of our role as professional academics, the importance of providing students with access to these debates is too often neglected. Although many researchers of history education have been challenging historical survey courses to move beyond a privileging of content coverage over critical inquiry, a systematic change in approach has been a long time coming (Wineburg, 2001). Recent revisions to the APUSH course, however, have attempted to institutionalize a move away from simple content mastery to a focus on historical interpretation and the debates that are currently taking place within the field of history.

In order to understand the impact of the most recent APUSH frameworks and their focus on historical interpretation, it is important to note trends in APUSH guidelines' development over the years. These frameworks progressed from a grand narrative approach to a coverage approach. Neither of these models gave students an idea of how histories are actually constructed. Whereas the first strategy presents one narrative as historical Truth, the latter foregoes narrative altogether. In contrast to these earlier versions, the 2014 and 2015 frameworks were created by a panel of professional historians who positioned these documents as a means of allowing students to investigate and compare multiple historical sources and narratives and their larger implications. By centering historical understanding over mere content memorization, the authors hoped to bring the AP course more in line with college level expectations.

Although the Advanced Placement US History exam first began in the mid 1950s, the earliest exams and frameworks I could access are from the mid 1960s. During this period, frameworks and suggested learning materials focused on one grand narrative stressing the exceptional nature of the United States with emphasis placed on political history and elite individuals over social history (Bailey, 1965; College Board, 1966). Although many historians in the 1960s began to move away from a focus on political history toward an exploration of social history, these trends for the most part did not reach school curricula. Launius (2013) notes that the "rise of the 'new social history' in the 1960s, with its emphasis on race, ethnicity, class, gender, and the way groups have wielded power throughout the nation's past, offered a powerful counterweight to the consensus interpretation" (p. 31). This opening in the field of history was not mirrored in most history classes. As Zimmerman (2002) notes in his discussion of attempts to reform history teaching during this period, "these changes were contested-and most significantly constrained- from the start" (p. 109). He discusses numerous attempts to rewrite teaching materials to reconsider the dominant narratives being told. Powerful Conservative watchdog groups, however, "blocked any material that might undermine the grand narrative" (p. 109). The AP US History framework and suggested textbooks from the mid 1960s aligns with the trend noted by Zimmerman, with a focus on grand narrative over historical interpretation and emphasis placed on political history and elite individuals over social history.

In attempts to bypass the politics of choosing which historical narratives to teach, frameworks from the last few decades pulled away from narrative, focusing instead on coverage. Caldor (2013) describes how students entering his class in the early 1990s described American history as a story of triumphant "glory", but in the last decade his students increasingly perceive history as "merely a listing of events" and "attribute no meaning or significance to any of it" (p.

6). This coverage model supposedly gives students a basis of facts that "cultivates cultural literacy" among students (Sipress & Voelker, 2011, p. 1062). This basis, however, has been criticized by many history educators as presenting a laundry list approach to the past where people, events and time periods are quickly rushed through but only tenuously tied together, thus leaving the past largely dry and void of meaning (Calder, 2013; Sipress & Voelker, 2011).

According to the writers of the current frameworks, the past versions' inability to create cohesion out of diverse perspectives led to teacher complaints. Unsure of where to place focus, teachers chose emphasis on coverage over depth (Byrne et al., 2014). The 2014 APUSH authors warn teachers not "to rush their students in a quick march through a list of historical events," but rather emphasizes the ability "to understand, formulate, and critique different interpretations of the past and of its meaning for today" (Byrne et al., 2014). The new frameworks pivot away from memorization and instead place focus on working with diverse primary and secondary sources to understand how narratives are constructed.

The 2014 as well as 2015 APUSH frameworks can be seen as an answer to the call by various historians to incorporate a greater focus on historical thinking into history curriculums (Sipress & Voelker, 2011; Wineburg, 2001). The degree to which this focus on historical understanding in the framework will actually play out in classroom instruction still needs be assessed. As these frameworks have only recently come out, there is very little information regarding whether or not teachers have significantly changed their strategies to center historical thinking. That being said, if one takes sample exams as evidence of the kind of reasoning privileged in the new course, the centering of critical inquiry during each stage of the test implies that students will need to go beyond memorization in order to succeed. Practice exams provided with the 2014 and 2015 frameworks rely on the ability to build historical interpretation through

the use and analysis of diverse primary sources (College Board, 2014, pp. pp. 82-115; College Board, 2015, pp. 112-143). Teachers must provide students with historical narratives in order to give meaning to the past. The question then remains of how to teach the past, how to make it meaningful without forming immovable pasts. The 2014 and 2015 frameworks seem to be a step in the direction of answering this question by encouraging teachers to focus on historical understanding at every step of the teaching process.

To illustrate the extent with which historical thinking is centered in the 2014 framework, the first 19 pages of the 81 page document are reserved for defining the importance of this skill. Throughout the course, teachers are expected to "apprentice students to the practice of history by explicitly stressing the development of historical thinking skills while learning about the past" (College Board, 2014, p.11). Rather than rely on textbooks to structure teaching, the new framework seeks to have students critically analyze the structure of such learning materials by contrasting them with primary and secondary sources depicting various perspectives and positionalities. Students are expected to engage in "exploration and interpretation of a rich array of primary sources and secondary texts" in order to gain insight into the "development of historical argumentation in writing" (2014, p. 11).

The 2015 edition, although very similar to the 2014 framework, does make a few cosmetic changes likely aimed at placating Conservative critics of the 2014 edition. Like the 2014 framework, the historical thinking section remains the first item discussed. As opposed to the 19 pages outlining the skills of critical inquiry, this initial section on historical thinking skills has been edited down and crammed into a two page abbreviated chart. While at first glance this may seem to place less focus on historical thinking, as one reads through to the end of the 110 page document, it becomes clear that critical inquiry retains its prominent role. After the Concept

Outline, the 2015 edition has added a section on "Developing the Historical Thinking Skills" under a segment labeled "Instructional Approaches" (College Board, 2015, pp. 95-109). This extensive addition provides teachers with ample means of effectively incorporating historical thinking skills into their curricula. The section stresses that although "History is a story of the past that serves to guide the present and the future," students must remember that this story is never fixed (College Board, 2015, p. 95). The introduction to the section states:

> The narrative that history relates, however, is only as faithful and complete a representation of what happened in the past as the human mind can recover. Because of this incompleteness, historical analysis is prone to error and rests upon interpretation, requiring critical evaluation at every step (2015, p. 95).

If you only followed the media coverage of the AP US History controversy, you would gain the impression that the 2015 framework is a victory for a Conservative reading of the nation's past. In reality, many of the changes, such as choosing to place the bulk of material regarding historical thinking under "Instructional Approaches" rather than at the start of the framework, appear to be more cosmetic than substantive and are most likely aimed at assuaging the fears of Conservatives that the College Board has centered theory over content.

Rather than view history as a given set of facts, of names of important people and dates of events, the new frameworks move away from earlier strategies and push students to look closer at how historical narratives are constructed. In the following sections I will analyze how online news and opinion editorials have framed the new guidelines in terms of historical Truth. I argue that this insistence on facts and objectivity creates detrimental consequences for public engagement and discussion regarding the past.

Reaffirming America's Greatness

Conservative Media Outcry to the 2014 APUSH Framework

In the following discussion I will first outline how a small group of traditionalist historians helped to fuel opposition to the 2014 APUSH framework. I will then outline how Conservative media pundits took up these critiques and monopolized public discourse surrounding the new framework, centering their opposition around three main themes: firstly, they maintain that the only way to accurately synthesize American history is around the theme of American exceptionalism and cohesion. Secondly, these articles assert that the 2014 framework fails to provide students with the basic "facts" of history, and lastly these articles condemn the supposed liberal bias of the 2014 edition.

On June 2, 2015, a group of 56 historians, mostly from private Christian colleges, signed a letter opposing the 2014 APUSH framework. They asserted that this framework was a dramatic departure from the traditional view of the United States as "one nation with common ideals and a shared story" (Agresto et al., 2015). Because of the large number of students who opt to take the course, the letter asserted that it has great "importance from the standpoint of civic education" (Agresto et al., 2015). Compared to the 2014 framework, previous editions "featured a strong insistence on content, i.e., on the students' acquisition of extensive factual knowledge of American history" (Agresto et al., 2015). The authors of the letter expressed deep concern in what they saw as an attempt to downplay "American citizenship and American world leadership in favor of a more global and transnational perspective" (Agresto et al., 2015). By including identity as one of seven thematic learning objectives in the new framework, the authors of the letter feared that the new course would rely too heavily on discussions of social divisions in society and would be "inattentive to the sources of national unity and cohesion" (Agresto et al.,

2015). These critiques contain nostalgia for a past teaching method that privileged a single narrative of American exceptionalism and unity. The goal of history education, according to the authors of the letter, is to provide students with the basic facts that build the foundation for *the* story of America's past.

Sipress & Voelker (2011) discuss how a driving rationale for United States history education historically has been to cultivate a certain degree of cultural literacy that will foster engagement among citizens (p. 1062). As can be seen in the opposition letter, the assumption is often that in order to function effectively as a form of citizenship education, United States history teaching must gravitate toward an affirming narrative that instills pride in one's country. As I will show through analysis of Conservative opinion editorials and media responses to the 2014/2015 frameworks, mainstream Conservative discourse circulates the notion that in order to facilitate national cohesion in the present, United States history education must stress cohesion over division in America's past.

Wilfred McClay, one of the signatories of the opposition letter to the 2014 framework, wrote an opinion editorial in *Imprimis*, Hillsdale College's monthly digest. In it, he bemoans the impacts of postmodernism on his field and longs for "an approach to the past that conduces most fully to a healthy foundation for our common, civic existence" (McClay, 2015). The purpose of history education, according to McClay, is to bring students into the fold. As an "act of inculcation and formation," American history is a necessary form of citizenship education (McClay, 2015). In this endeavor, McClay laments that "Nor, alas, will professional historians be much help, since their work proceeds from a different set of premises" (McClay, 2015). The qualms McClay has with both the 2014 framework and the contemporary trends in historiography that shaped it are mirrored in the voices of Conservative op-eds around the nation.

"A century ago," writes McClay, "professional historians still imagined that their discipline could be a science, able to explain the doings of nations and peoples with the dispassionate precision of a natural science" (McClay, 2015). Rather than the "coherent and truth-seeking enterprise" of history's glory days, McClay asserts that the field is now "seen as a relativistic funhouse, in which all narratives are arbitrary and all interpretations are equally valid" (McClay, 2015).

He asserts that postmodernism's "insistence on subjecting it [history] to endless rounds of interrogation and suspicion, aiming precisely at the destabilization of public meanings—is likely to produce impassable obstacles to the effective public commemoration of the past" (McClay, 2015). For McClay and his fellow traditionalist historian signatories of the letter denouncing the 2014 framework, "history has become the principle victim in the age of fracture" (McClay, 2015). Only through reassembling those pieces into a coherent narrative of unity and American exceptionalism, McClay asserts, can US history education fulfill its goal of unifying the nation through effective citizenship education.

McClay's tone, which reads like a eulogy to the field, makes evident his distress with now holding a marginal view in the discipline. Even for those who reject the postmodern label, the majority of historians embrace postmodernism's influence in resisting closure and questioning received narratives. Historian Sam Wineburg (2001) states "in our post-modern age, historical works that abjure emotion are themselves suspect, viewed as devices that mask, through rhetorical means, the underlying polemical nature of their arguments" (p. 238). Wineburg notes that even as "the profession celebrates subjectivity and positionality, two cardinal virtues of postmodernity," the idea that historical objectivity is both attainable and desirable lives on in the public sphere (2001, p. 238). In contrast with the contemporary

historiographical debates regarding the degree with which postmodernism has impacted the epistemological basis of the field of history, opinions expressed in the public sphere among Conservative media pundits carry forth McClay's enlightenment quest for historical Truth rooted in American exceptionalism rather than dialogue.

Echoing the critiques of McClay, the Conservative media responses assert a need for historical synthesis centering on American exceptionalism. On April 1st, 2015 Lynne Cheney wrote an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* entitled "The End of History, Part II". The title alludes to a 1994 piece Cheney had written in the *Journal* opposing the National Standards for United States History which she perceived as diminishing America's exceptional past. In Part II, Cheney makes the same argument as her earlier piece, but this time the target of her ire is the 2014 APUSH framework. She asserts that the 2014 edition, like the 1994 National Standards, were "so biased that I felt obliged to condemn them" (Cheney, 2015). She bemoans the supposed erasure of America's great heroes such as Benjamin Franklin "whose rise from rags to riches would have been possible only in America" (Cheney, 2015). In a similar piece in the *Wall Street Journal* entitled "Bye, Bye American History" in June of 2015, Daniel Henninger compared the 2014 APUSH framework to the memory hole of George Orwell's novel *1984*. Henninger asserts that similar to the memory hole, which was meant to destroy all remnants of history that Big Brother deemed unfavorable, the 2014 framework seeks to mask the Truth of American exceptionalism and unity. Students who would normally disagree with this insidious take on American history, Henninger writes, "know the Orwellian option now is to stay down" (Henninger, 2015). In a similar appeal to save American exceptionalism, Robin Smith (2015) writing for the Right wing news outlet *The Patriot Post* states that the 2014 framework marks a "display of arrogance and a direct assault on America" which "should be a call to action for all who are keepers of our

American story" (Smith, 2015). She states that "truth of America's courageous founding" should "increase in value as time passes, not be treated like some dime-store trinket" (Smith, 2015). The 2014 framework was thus panned by Conservative media pundits as an assault on American exceptionalism.

Following the release of the 2015 edition, Henninger wrote a follow-up piece in *The Wall Street Journal* entitled "Hey Conservatives, You Won," in which he positions the 2015 reworking of the APUSH framework as a "significant political event". He states that whereas the 2014 framework "read like a left-wing dream," the 2015 edition marks "the resurrection of an American idea the left wants to extinguish" (Henninger, 2015). Nowhere in the piece does Henninger confront the continuity of focus in *both* guidelines on critical inquiry and historical process. Rather, Henninger focuses on small adjustments in the language of the Concept Outline. Arthur Schaper (2015) writing in the Conservative media outlet *TruthRevolt* agrees with Henniger's assessment that the 2015 framework is a blow to the Left. He writes "The Left has targeted major institutions like education, media, and medicine for decades to wage their fight… Now conservative activists are taking back education" (Schaper, 2015). The majority of Conservative media coverage asserts that although the 2014 framework failed to synthesize history around the concept of American exceptionalism, with enough Conservative outcry the College Board was forced rewrite the document.

A minority of Conservative commentators did not view the 2015 edition as a victory for the Right. These articles assert that even the 2015 framework needs to go further in centering American exceptionalism. Writing in the Conservative journal *The National Review,* Stanley Kurtz (2015) laments that in both the 2014 and 2015 editions, America's unique institutions, culture and free market system "are neither stressed nor contrasted with other countries to

highlight the American difference" (Kurtz, 2015). Whether for or against the 2015 framework, Conservative op-eds ubiquitously paint the narrative of American cohesion and exceptionalism as historical Truth. Both the 2014 and 2015 frameworks are thus painted in an intractable black and white: they either represent an acceptance that American exceptionalism is Truth or they represent an attack on *the* traditional American story.

The second central critique of the 2014 framework is the belief that it places critical thinking skills above learning historical "facts". This critique is rooted in the assumption that there exists an unambiguous historical record. Lloyd Mallison writing for the *Boston Globe*'s online cite Boston.com, interviewed Jane Robbins of the American Principles Project. Robbins sees the 2014 edition's focus on critical inquiry as a hindrance to learning. She asserts that students need to know the facts: "The College Board is going into a progressive mode, which is less of a focus on actual learning, and more on historical thinking,' she said. 'If students don't know the facts they can opine and debate as much as you want to, but they need to learn American history.' (Lloyd Mallison, 2015). Here Robbins assumes that a focus on critical inquiry, rather than an in-depth method for teaching content, is a replacement of content. For Robbins, to learn history seems to be the act of memorizing facts. Indeed what is there to debate about if, as Robbins seems to assume, we already have access to the complete historical record? Smith (2015) similarly asserts in *The Patriot Post* that the APUSH framework's focus on critical thinking skills marks an assault on the historical Truth of American exceptionalism. She states: "The educrats sought to 'redirect the course away from rote memorization of facts and toward historical thinking skills'. Translation: Who needs the facts of history to frame the portrait of a nation's greatness?" (Smith, 2015). These positions perceive historical knowledge as universal and the historical record as transparent. The act of critical inquiry, of attempting to understand

how historical narratives and their sources construct different versions of the past, is seen under this paradigm as an assault on knowledge.

The third critique that permeates the Conservative coverage asserts that the 2014 framework is imbued with a Liberal bias. Suspicion towards academia and an "intellectual" approach to history education is present in many of these articles. Frederick M. Hess and Max Eden (2015) wrote an opinion piece in *US News and World Report* asserting that the professors who worked on the 2014 AP US History framework "tended to bring a worldview and innate biases with them, ones so common as to be unexceptional to them" (Hess & Eden, 2015). Like many opponents to the 2014 edition, their piece is skeptical of trends in the field of history that they view as containing a liberal bias. They position academics against the desires of the public to learn our American story. They state: "While those academics are certainly entitled to their views, their handiwork was out-of-step with how most Americans, right and left, think history ought to be taught to high schoolers" (Hess & Eden, 2015). According to Hess and Eden, the public wants history free from the bias taking over academia. Like Henninger, they describe the 2014 framework as liberal indoctrination and hail the 2015 framework as a victory for the historical Truth of American exceptionalism. The accusation of liberal bias in the 2014 framework is ubiquitous in the Conservative media coverage. According to Dan Weber, president of the Association of Mature American Citizens, as quoted by John Grimaldi in the *Imperial Valley Press*:

> The history of our country is irreversible. No one has the right to misrepresent the facts. Those who would pervert the past for political objectives in the future with intellectual claptrap cannot be allowed to succeed in brainwashing our children in their classrooms (Grimaldi, 2015).

This position assumes that if we simply conferred with the historical record we would understand what really happened and how the Liberal academics are trying to conceal this Truth. This belief

in historical Truth that views professional historians as attempting to "pervert the past" with a Liberal bias permeates through many of the Conservative opinion pieces (Grimaldi, 2015).

I have outlined three main critiques presented in the Conservative coverage following the release of the 2014 framework (and in a few cases the 2015 framework): firstly, that the framework fails to synthesize the past around American exceptionalism, secondly, that the framework places historical thinking above historical facts, and thirdly, that the framework is imbued with the liberal bias of its authors. One issue with the coverage of the frameworks on mainstream news outlets such as *CNN*, the *LA Times*, *Newsweek*, and *USA Today* is that all of these outlets quote the same Conservative commentators again and again. By giving a larger platform to a small but vocal group of critics rather than seeking a variety of voices regarding the new frameworks, the public, many of whom undoubtedly have not had time to read the lengthy frameworks themselves, is left relying on these testimonies to give a representative depiction of the impact of the new guidelines. Among the commentators continuously cited are Fredrick Hess, a Director of Education Policy Studies at the center-right American Enterprise institute, conservative commentator Stanley Kurtz and Jane Robbins of the Conservative American Principles Project. As I will demonstrate in the following section, all of these commentators provide critiques that ignore central elements of both the 2014 and 2015 frameworks that bring them up to date with the field of history.

Addressing Conservative Media Critiques

New APUSH Frameworks Embrace Historical Indeterminacy

In the following section, I will return to the three main Conservative media critiques of the new APUSH frameworks and establish how these critiques are out of touch with recent trends in historiography. The majority of professional historians have supported both the 2014

and 2015 frameworks. In contrast to the 56 historians who wrote a letter opposing the 2014 framework, the American Historical Association, the largest group of professional historians with over 14,000 members, wrote a letter in support of both the 2014 and 2015 frameworks. Advanced Placement courses count toward college credit and the content of these courses is therefore intended to be equivalent to what students would encounter in an entry-level college course. Such entry-level courses provide students with a basic understanding of the field, and thus the content of these courses needs to reflect an awareness of how knowledge is crafted within those fields. In the following section, I will illustrate how the new APUSH frameworks help students understand what history is through the *doing* of history.

As described in the previous section, the Conservative media critiques center around three main themes. In the discussion that follows, I address each of these critiques in turn, showing how the new frameworks deal with issues of historical synthesis, historical facts and the positionality of historians in a way that moves history teaching towards trends in the field. I also explain why this move is crucial in instituting a transition in history education to empowering students through embracing indeterminacy.

Although synthesis is necessary to the field of history, if students learn to synthesize the past through the singular lens of American exceptionalism, they miss out on other important ways of seeing. In order for students to learn, the past must be synthesized in some fashion, it must be made legible. In an attempt to distill the essential elements of the past into a meaningful narrative, however, textbooks and teachers too often fall back on a grand metanarrative whose assumptions remain unquestioned (Wineburg, 2001). History cannot be understood as a simple series of events, each of which is influenced by past occurrences and plays a role in shaping the path to the future. Historian John Gaddis (2002) asserts that historical synthesis must choose

which elements to emphasize and which to ignore in order for the past to be legible and not devolve into a sea of details. He states that, "…history, like cartography, is necessarily a representation of reality… a reality that, even with the greatest skill of the historian, would seem very strange to anyone who actually lived through it" (p. 136). Although synthesis is necessary to create a cohesive narrative of the past, that narrative is not a complete reflection of the actual historical events, but rather a partial view of a possible past. In accordance with these scholarly discussions, the 2014 framework stresses the importance and risks of synthesis in the process of historical invention. The framework states that, "in U.S. history there is a predisposition of developing a single narrative that consolidates and merges many different cultures" (College Board, 2014, p. 19). It warns that such a tendency, however, "raises the historiographical question about which groups are included or excluded from the story" (College Board, 2014, p. 19). In order to avoid synthesis that suppresses dissenting narratives, the framework states: "Students should be encouraged to challenge the narratives to which they are exposed so that they will have a better understanding of their place in an increasingly globalized and diverse world" (College Board, 2014, p. 19). The same concerns regarding synthesis are debated among professional historians. Gaddis (2002) warns that in attempting to imbue history with meaning through a grand narrative, one risks "imagining a community, the process that is the basis for most nationalism" (p. 142). Such a single story can oppress the past by implying "the exclusion or persecution of those not part of the community" (p. 142). Gaddis thus warns against those who seek to frame the past in a way that "seeks legibility while neglecting accountability" (p. 144).

By focusing entirely on whether or not the frameworks reflect the historical Truth of American exceptionalism, the Conservative coverage is at odds with trends in the field of history that reject a singular lens as Truth. In accordance with the majority of historians, both the 2014

and 2015 frameworks assert that all attempts to synthesize the past are *representations* and thus subject to critical inquiry. Although active critique of these representations is of course important, when one assumes one's position to be based in historical Truth, that vision becomes myopic and stifles dissent by refusing to acknowledge that truth can exist in competing planes. In opposition to the Conservative op-eds that paint American history as one narrative of exceptionalism, the new frameworks bring history teaching up to date with trends in the field. They stress that narratives of US history presented to students should always be taught as provisional and open to interrogation and debate.

The second critique of the 2014 framework made by the Conservative media coverage is that this edition rejects content mastery and knowledge of historical "facts" in favor of historical thinking and critical inquiry. This position assumes the historical record to be transparent and thus critical inquiry to be more or less obsolete. The majority of historians, however, understand that artifacts themselves are not stable and do not present historians with "facts" as such. The sources they encounter are shadows of an inaccessible past which change depending on the light they shine upon them. According to historian Sam Wineburg (2001), primary sources do not describe the past for historians, but rather provide the historian with "slippery" clues that reflect "the uncertainty and disingenuity of the real world" (p. 67). These clues are always partial and open to interpretation. Wineburg asserts, "Just as readers decode authors, so texts decode readers" (p. 74). According to Wineburg, because primary sources are not filled with fixed meanings but rather "plays of potentialities," the way the reader decodes these texts says as much about the reader and the world he inhabits as it does about the historical author of the text (p. 74). Ginzburg (1999) also rejects the notion that historians simply reconstruct reality. He is equally insistent that sources provide real insight; they are not simply putty in the historian's hands. He

asserts that sources bring historians in contact with "one face of reality" in the form of "distorting mirrors" rather than "open windows" into the past (p. 25). Although he emphasizes that, "the analysis of the specific distortion of every specific source already implies a constructive element," he also stresses throughout the book that rhetorical construction "is not incompatible with proof" (25). Although historians disagree about the degree of distortion, about just how much influence a historian has in attributing meaning to an artifact, few if any would argue that artifacts provide historians with direct, unmediated access to the past.

In the 2014 and 2015 frameworks, both the reliability of sources as well as the completeness of the historical record is placed into question. Students are encouraged to consider the positionality of sources historians use to construct their narratives. They must gain practice in "evaluating points of view found in both primary and secondary sources" (2014, p.17). The 2015 framework stresses that because all sources are positioned in a specific place and time representing certain interests for a particular audience, "Documents of every type are incomplete" (p. 96). Because these sources provide us with only a partial perspective, "a historian must be aware that the meaning of a document often lies in what it does not say, as much as what it says (p. 99). Not only are the sources themselves incomplete, but the archives that hold them, no matter how large, do not represent a complete historical record. As the 2015 framework notes, throughout time the preservation of sources is a selective process in which "Documents deemed unimportant or controversial often do not survive" (p. 97). Rhetorician Barbara Biesecker (2006) asserts that "the archive as instituted trace anchors nothing absolutely" and thus "history is what is *not* in the archive, *not* in any archive, *not* even in all the archives added together" (p. 127). The ways in which histories are woven together are too often hidden, making it seem as if these stories were always- already in existence. When students first begin to

investigate history in the classroom they are rarely confronted with the primary sources used to make historical claims and when they are, all too often these sources are seen as a window into the past rather than as intellectually privileged and situated documents. By asserting that both sources and their archives are inherently incomplete, the 2014 and 2015 frameworks give students a notion of the past's indeterminacy that is in accordance with current historiographical debates. This counters the Conservative media coverage that largely assumes a transparent historical record.

This assumption that we have access to an unmediated connection to the past is exacerbated by an overreliance on textbook learning. Wineburg (2001) has documented that textbooks tend to propagate a belief that "the way things are told is simply the way things were" (p. 12). Both the 2014 and 2015 frameworks stress the importance of moving beyond textbook learning. Whereas an overreliance on textbooks tends to leave students more focused on memorization than inquiry, "Rich, diverse source material allows the teacher more flexibility in designing learning activities that develop the habits of historical thinking that are essential for student success in the course" (College Board, 2015, p. 92). The 2014 framework also encourages teachers to use textbooks and other learning materials, such as the framework itself, as works to be pulled apart and analyzed. They encourage students, for example, to "compare this periodization [provided in the Concept Outline] against competing models, such as the one used in their textbook" (p. 14). By opening up the framework itself to critique, the authors encourage students to question the decisions they have made in structuring certain periods and themes. This strategy may help prevent students from viewing textbooks and frameworks as "just reporting the facts" (Wineburg, 2001, p. 68). By providing teachers with instructional approaches that use primary and secondary sources as well as textbooks (all of which are open to analysis),

the 2014 and 2015 frameworks allow students to understand how histories are constructed. This moves historical discussions away from the irresolvable debates over "facts" presented in the Conservative media coverage.

The third main critique of the 2014 framework made in the Conservative media coverage is that the document lacks objectivity and is tainted with a liberal bias. The historical profession, however, has for the most part rejected the idea that historical works and history education can exist in a bias-free vacuum. Because historians are themselves historical beings, speaking from bodies situated within a particular place and time, it is impossible for historians to separate their own experiences of the world completely from their interpretations of the past. Teaching students to consider the positionality of both sources and historians is necessary in order to avoid passive acceptance of received narratives. O'Brian (1999) remarks that historians are "inescapably situated (a good word for their unavoidable predicament) in their: times, genders, cultures, ethnicities, generations, religions and ethical suppositions" (O'Brian, 1999). If it is true that the historian can never fully bracket herself from her analysis, the historian's proclivities will always be present, to some extent, in her work. In the absence of universal truths that exist free of space and time and untethered to situated bodies, definitive claims regarding the past become untenable. It is not that historians have ceded the right to make claims about the past. It is more that the claims made are no longer definitive statements, but rather a conversation between the author, other historians and remnants of the past. As historian Laura Edwards emphasizes, this process "does not make historical writing a futile endeavor"(Edwards, 2011). History is successful, Edwards argues, because it fosters a discussion between the past and the present that is "as much about self-discovery as it is about discovery of the past" (Edwards, 2011). The APUSH frameworks similarly eschew the notion of the objective historian. In one section on

periodization, for example, the 2014 framework stresses that students should not be taught to view divisions of time as natural. Students are encouraged to ask about the reasons why a historian has chosen to divide the past along certain lines and the value impacts of such decisions: “The choice of specific dates gives a higher value to one narrative, region, or group than to other narratives, regions, or groups” (2014, p. 13). The framework continues to stress the importance of understanding how the positionality of the historian impacts the choices she makes: “Moreover, historical thinking involves being aware of how the circumstances and contexts of a historian’s work might shape his or her choices about periodization” (2014, p. 13). By emphasizing the position of the historian in making choices about the past, and by viewing historians themselves as historical actors imbedded in a particular context, students become aware that the past in by no means given and narratives about the past always entail value judgments.

As seen through the outpouring of Conservative media coverage after the release of the 2014 APUSH framework, this coverage seems to be working from a very different set of assumptions regarding the past than those of the majority of historians. These outcries see the metanarrative of American exceptionalism as Truth, view the historical record as comprised of transparent “facts” and believe that objective history education simply relays these facts to students. Despite their call for bias-free history, the prominent narratives of unity and American exceptionalism are clearly ingrained with a moral ideology. By appealing to facts, reason, objectivity and historical Truth, however, these op-eds and news articles position their particular ideology as universal, as Truth, and thus beyond bias.

The gap between the Conservative media depiction of the frameworks and what the frameworks actually accomplish has immense significance on public (mis)understanding of these

documents. Presenting one historical model as objective, as what "actually" took place, inhibits students from engaging in a greater exploration of how meaning is constructed in historical narratives. Prosise (1998) argues that publicly framing "a particular collective memory" as "objective history" refuses to acknowledge the contested nature of the past. In doing so, such singular narratives "limit professional historians' contributions to public knowledge and debate, and therefore, limit more informed public reflection" (Prosise, 1998, p. 317). The trend in the conservative articles following the release of the 2014 and to some extent the 2015 framework as well represents them as issuing forth a biased view of the past which discards "objective" history as it has supposedly been told for generations for what critics call a radically revisionist version of the past. Like Prosise's critique, however, I assert that such positions close public dialogue about the past by propagating the myth of objective history, a position rejected by the majority of professional historians.

America's History of Oppression:
Appeals to Historical Objectivity and Truth from the Left

It has not only been Conservative opponents of the APUSH frameworks who have pushed for more "objectivity" and basis in "facts" in history teaching. Many Liberal media articles published after the release of the 2015 edition protested the imposition of Conservative values on history education. By asserting a narrative of American oppression as rooted in historical Truth such claims also close out discussion of multiple readings of the past. Similar to their Conservative counterparts, the Liberal media response for the most part subscribes to a belief that history should be "objective" and free of bias, and views postmodernism as a slide into relativism and an assault on Truth. In the following section, I will discuss how the Liberal media coverage employs appeals to one historical Truth and a transparent historical record in an effort to ensure that history education will not omit or gloss over injustices. After laying out

these concerns presented in the Liberal media coverage, I turn to historical literature that counters these critiques. These historians stress that letting go of historical objectivity does not mean accepting historical relativism.

A black and white image appears on the screen. Pete Seeger, chin held high and clad in white, strums on the banjo nestled in his arms. In a playfully mocking tone his voice sings out "What did you learn in school today, Dear little boy of mine? I learned that Washington never told a lie. I learned that soldiers seldom die. I learned that everybody's free, And that's what the teacher said to me..." (Goodman, 2014). As this folksy tune continues to play, Seeger's image fades and is replaced with still photos of students and teachers holding protest signs, one in the foreground reads "TEACH US THE TRUTH" (Goodman, 2014). The above sequence ended the *Democracy Now!* segment entitled "After Censorship of History Course, Colorado Students & Teachers Give a Lesson in Civil Disobedience". Earlier in the *Democracy Now!* segment, hosts Amy Goodman and Juan Gonzalez interviewed a student protestor and a teacher from the Jefferson County School district. Ashlyn Maher, one of the high school student protestors, told *Democracy Now!*: "I have a little brother and a little sister that will grow up in the Jeffco community… I really want them to be presented with the facts, just like I was. I really don't think that they should be taught somebody else's opinion" (Goodman, 2014). Although Maher and her fellow protestors resisted the traditional narrative of America's past advocated by their School Board, by asserting the existence of historical Truth free of bias, their attempts undermined the intentions of the 2014 APUSH framework that they claimed to support. When Maher proclaimed that she wanted to be "presented with the facts" free from "opinion", she unwittingly belied the very focus of the 2014 (and now 2015) frameworks: their attempt to instill in students a sense that historical narratives are always situated and partial (Goodman, 2014).

Although the media narrative presented in *Democracy Now!* is meant to give voice to the oppressed, it serves to continue a means of exclusion by ignoring the constructed nature of individual and group histories.

Many Progressive media articles that supported the 2014 framework made appeals to historical Truth when defending it against Conservative attacks. These articles largely framed the 2015 edition as a concession by the College Board to critiques from the Right. Judy Molland (2015) writing for *TruthOut*, asserts that the 2015 framework represents a Conservative takeover that prevents accountability in history. She states that, "At a time when the U.S. still has a 'gaping racial wound,' to quote Jon Stewart, our public education system should be taking a stand for the truth, not trying to minimize any issues they find unpleasant"(Molland, 2015). Although I support the need to highlight the histories of oppressed peoples, the rhetorical strategy of supporting these counter-narratives with appeals to objective, historical Truth runs the risk of replacing one metanarrative with another.

Like Molland, Jake Flanagin (2015), in an article for *Quartz,* argues that the 2015 standards "gloss over the country's racist past" (Flanagin, 2015). He states that "At a time when our racialized history is particularly visible, stunting students with warped, sugar-coated notions of social and political history will only foster more divisiveness" (Flanagin, 2015). He ends his critique of the 2015 framework with a tongue and cheek musing of where such editing of America's past will lead us: "Get excited for the inevitable 2016 revisions, where slavery will be referred to as 'involuntary labor,' Native Americans will be called 'pre-Americans,' and casus belli for the Civil War will be diluted down to a simple dispute on the true height of Lincoln's top hat" (Flanagin, 2015). Although debate regarding the contents of the 2015 Concept Outline is valuable, Flanagin fails to mention that the framework itself does not see this outline as the only

way to understand America's past. Quite the opposite, the 2015 edition encourages teachers to view the Concept Outline as text to be pulled apart and questioned in addition to all learning materials used in the course (textbooks, primary sources, etc.) (College Board, 2015, p. 92; College Board, 2014, p. 14). By focusing solely on isolated pieces of content provided in the outline and ignoring the framework's focus on critical inquiry, Flanagin mischaracterizes the 2015 edition as a hegemonic metanarrative that will be employed to indoctrinate students.

An anonymous (2015) editorial in the *Toledo Blade* similarly asserts that while "the 2014 standards included historically vetted facts about slavery and racial exclusion" the 2015 changes are "politically motivated" and "undermine the goals of learning our nation's history" (anonymous, 2015). The editorial asks the College Board to heed the "demands of historical truth" in order to ensure that students understand the injustices that create the bedrock of America's past (anonymous, 2015). The editorial warns that "They [students] shouldn't be taught that the United States is immune to the rules of history" (anonymous, 2015). Although such pieces push back against hegemonic notions of history exemplified in the Conservative coverage, this resistance runs the risk of replacing one unshakable past with another. These editorials from the left following the 2015 release disregard the ways in which their narrative construction of the past may also serve to quash debate by laying claim to historical Truth and thus excluding contesting voices.

Op-ed and media coverage from the Left and the Right following the 2014 and 2015 APUSH frameworks asserts an exclusive reading of the past based in a notion of objective historical Truth. Open discussion regarding how we interpret history deconstructs the mythical notion of an objective past thereby promoting a richer understanding of how different narratives function with identity, exposing the situated nature of all historical discourse. The position, as

exemplified in the frameworks themselves, that students must learn to see historical narratives in addition to the sources used to construct them as themselves rhetorical, is lost in the larger media debate from positions on both the Right and the Left.

The Possibilities of Action and Accountability in a Postmodern World

One of the key assumptions embedded in the Liberal media response to the 2015 framework is that the only way to hold the United States accountable for historical injustices is through presenting the narrative of American oppression as historical Truth. Such concerns regarding the need for accountability bring up important questions. If we cannot appeal to an essential Truth in defense of our positions regarding our past, then what basis do we have for demanding change for those aspects of our society we find unjust in the present? In the following section, I will outline similar concerns from historians and philosophers regarding the possibilities of accountability in a postmodern world. I will then turn to scholars who respond to these concerns by asserting that accepting indeterminacy with regards to the past does not mean giving up ones values. Lastly, I turn to the 2014 and 2015 frameworks that establish how historical knowledge and meaning is not discovered, it does not exist as a transcendent Truth, but rather is constructed in the mutually constitutive dialogue between historians and their sources. Accountability thus requires those studying history to listen carefully to the sources and narratives they encounter- both for what is present and absent in these texts.

Philosopher Seyla Benhabib (1996) fears that the turn to postmodernism has created a "retreat from utopia" (p. 553). By utopia, she does not mean "the modernist vision of a wholesale restructuring of our social and political universe according to some rationally worked out plan" (p. 553). She does assert, however, that we are in need of "a regulative principle of hope" without which "not only morality but also radical transformation is unthinkable" (p. 553). She

asserts that "Postmodernism can teach us the theoretical and political traps of why utopias and foundational thinking can go wrong, but it should not lead us to retreat from utopia altogether" (Benhabib, 1996, p. 554). Appleby et al. (1996) similarly assert that although postmodern thinkers have "facilitated the efforts of marginalized groups to deconstruct the totalizing histories of modernity", they also wonder whether postmodernism "undermines the possibility of constructing new ones to take their place" (p. 492). Without a collective moral vision of the past and what we want from our future, how are we ever to enact societal change?

In 2002, a special forum of *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* raised questions about whether we have reached the limits of postmodern tendencies to deconstruct all moral claims. The dialogue produced in this forum provides insights into how we might address the concerns regarding historical accountability proposed by the Liberal media response to the APUSH frameworks. After the events of September 11th reverberated through the national consciousness, its impacts became an immediate subject of intense debate questioning our postmodern sensibilities in regards to the nature of evil. Writing in the forum, Vankevich (2003) asks whether we can "as meaning-needing beings, function without large-scale framing devices" (p. 559)? While acknowledging the potential dangers of foundational narratives, he nonetheless questions whether postmodernism leaves us "without sustaining morally cognitive benchmarks" (p. 558).

Writing in the same forum, Eberly (2003) responds that any attempt to define evil is a futile endeavor that begins from the false premise "not only that evil exists but that humans- limited by time and space- can know it" (p. 552-553). Claims about evil, she asserts, "shut down deliberation" by presenting false closure that focuses attention away from engaged discussion about the complex causes and consequences of tragic events (pp. 552-553). Cloud (2003)

presents a means to address this apparent standstill, of how to envision a better society without falling back on foundational thinking. She argues for the historical and political contextualization of evil. Although she asserts that evil can never be understood as a universal concept, she nonetheless states that "There are such things as goods and virtues" (p.537). These values, however, must be situated. We must continue to ask "whose goods they are and what and whose ends they serve" (p. 537). While we need to acknowledge the constructed nature of morality, Cloud emphasizes we must also "not give up the grounds for judgment and action" (p. 537). These communication scholars struggle with the dilemma of how to frame the impact of events like 9-11 in our nation's history, how to deal with notions of evil and accountability, that enable judgment and action without succumbing to totalizing metanarratives. By placing traumatic historical events like 9-11, the Vietnam War, and WWII in political and historical context by continuously questioning where various narratives originate and whose interests they serve, the 2014 and 2015 frameworks allow students to engage with the significance of these events without presenting one reading as Truth.

Some historians see feminist theory's concept of situated knowledge as a way of addressing postmodern concerns while still defending the pursuits of historical research. Historian Linda Gordon writes: "Few historians believe that they play no interpretive role; few believe that any interpretation is as good as any other" (p. 684). She goes on to explain that the "prevailing 'standpoint' theory is not at all relativist. It argues that individuals are constrained in their insights by their social positions; and that, other things being equal, some social positions produce better views of certain topics than others" (Gordon, 684). Haraway (1988) similarly argues that only through acknowledging our partial knowledge can we open ourselves to a larger

web of connections based on open, power-sensitive conversations. She states: “The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular” (p. 590).

Acknowledging that all discourse is constructed means acknowledging “The positionings of the subjugated are not exempt from critical reexamination” (Haraway, 1988, p. 584). Critical inquiry involves not only questioning the metanarratives of those in power, but also those counter-narratives which seek to replace them. According to Susan Hekman (1997) this does not mean that feminist scholars should give up on their politics. Hekman argues that our society is based on particular value assumptions and that one of these assumptions is what constitutes a persuasive argument. She asserts that although postmodern critiques hinder feminists from claiming “their values to be the objectively correct ones,” their values are ultimately what allow them to avoid relativism (p. 362). Thus, according to Hekman, although “we all live in a world devoid of a normative metanarrative” we can nonetheless “offer persuasive arguments in defense of our values and the politics they entail” (p.362). We all live in communities with standards for evidence. Because these standards are constructed, they are always subject to investigation, to pointing out internal contradictions within the framework itself. Although these standards do not provide universal Truth from which to justify our actions and analyses, they do provide a situated space from which knowledge can be produced. According to Haraway and Hekman, this knowledge has meaning despite being constructed and partial.

The 2015 framework asserts that each of us is situated within “a unique point of view” (p. 96). Even those of us who seek “an objective and truthful account of an event will be limited in our ability… to determine what was significant about the event and what can be left out of the account” (2015, p. 96). The 2014 and 2015 frameworks present students with the postmodern questioning of historians’ and sources’ ability to create “truthful and objective” accounts of past

events (College Board, 2015, p. 95). Despite our inability to know the past in concrete terms, the framework stresses the importance of historical study in enriching "one's sense of belonging to a human community" (College Board, 2015, p. 95). Although we will never know fully what came before us, I argue that accepting this indeterminacy opens our encounters to a complexity that enhances our relationship with the past.

Responding to fears embedded in the Liberal media response to the 2015 framework, I have illustrated that embracing historical indeterminacy does not require us to relinquish our values and politics. When analyzing various conceptions of the past, the 2014 and 2015 frameworks push students to move beyond asking whether or not a historical account is objective Truth to asking whose values are imbedded in the diverse historical narratives they will encounter. Although we will never unearth the Truth of a time now gone, we create meaning through the search, through a curiosity that remains open to new possibilities.

Conclusion

The 2014 and 2015 frameworks attempt to move students toward an understanding of historical interpretation. Through gaining this skill students may begin to see history as more than dry facts. History is meaningful only insofar as it fosters a sense of empathy based in respecting the insurmountable distance that separates us from the past. Wineburg (2001) emphasizes the importance of cultivating the skill of historical thinking:

> Coming to know others, whether they live on the other side of the tracks or the other side of the millennium, requires the education of our sensibilities… Paradoxically what allows us to come to know others is our distrust in our capacity to know them, a skepticism in the extraordinary sense-making capabilities that allow us to construct the world around us (p.24).

Only through acknowledging that we will never be able to reach the past can we begin to open up to the possibilities that come with accepting that our knowledge will always be incomplete. This paper outlines how media coverage of the frameworks obscured public understanding of

these documents' contribution to history education in terms of historical thinking. In contrast to media portrayal of the new frameworks as representative of an intractable black and white battle over historical Truth, the 2014 and 2015 frameworks open the door for students to engage with the complexities of historical invention by presenting students with an understanding of the past as indeterminate and open to dialogue. By creating a simplistic narrative of the past to the public that positions the frameworks as either Liberal or Conservative history, the media coverage inhibits effective public discussion and understanding.

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