

Title of Session: Social Studies Forum - History Textbooks

Moderator: Michael Hutchison

Guest Speaker: Kyle Ward

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MichaelH: Welcome to tonight's Social Studies forum session

MichaelH: We have a really interesting and exciting topic for you this evening.

MichaelH: We THINK we know a lot about historic events, and how those events are told in our textbooks...

MichaelH: BUT...

MichaelH: the interpretation frequently changes as time goes on....

MichaelH: what we read today, may not be what our kids read tomorrow...

MichaelH: so... Kyle will be discussing how history textbooks change the story as times change

MichaelH: Before we get too much farther, let's start with some introductions...

MichaelH: would everyone let us know who you are, where you teach, etc.?

BjB: I teach remedial communication in Pennsylvania

MichaelH is a social studies teacher in southwestern Indiana

HeatherBu: I'm a middle school teacher in Texas

KyleGst15: I teach history/political science at Vincennes University in Indiana.

JeremG: Jeremy Greene, history teacher - USII and World II, Chelmsford, MA right next to Lowell, MA

DanGr: US History, US Government = Eastern PA

DavidWe is a HelpDesk volunteer in Tapped In and leads a math education and technology discussion here. I'm in New Jersey, near New York City

MaryJG: I teach History at an International Baccalaureate high- school, Copol, in Guayaquil, Ecuador

MichaelH: wow, we have an international audience this evening! That's great!

MichaelH: just curious, where are you located in TX?

HeatherBu: I'm northeast of Houston, in a small rural community

MichaelH: As I mentioned, Kyle (Ward) is our special guest tonight... he has a very interesting presentation about how interpretation of history changes over time... I saw Kyle speak at the Indiana Council for the Social Studies conference in Indianapolis in October

MichaelH: and I've known him for some time

MichaelH: I didn't know if you had some questions you wanted to start with, or a quick introduction into the book....

MichaelH: up to you

KyleGst15: OK, I'll go.

KyleGst15: Last Oct. my book titled "History in the Making" was published.

KyleGst15: In it I looked at how US history textbooks portrayed American historical stories for the past 200 years.

KyleGst15: I wanted to see how different generations were taught the stories that we all heard growing up and attending school.

KyleGst15: What I discovered is that our great American stories have changed over time, often due to the current social and political climate.

KyleGst15: What some one read in 1796 is often drastically different then what was written in 2006.

KyleGst15: As a history teacher, I want my current students to learn that history is NOT written in stone and that it actually effects their lives.

KyleGst15: Sadly, too often students feel that history is boring and a huge waste of their time. Or is this just in my own classes!?

JeremG: This sounds like an expanded part of the first part of History on Trial Which only looked at about 100 years. Any truth to this?

BjB . o O (some adults feel that way too)

MaryJG: I always tell my students that we study History to learn from our past mistakes

DavidWe . o O (we hope)

KyleGst15: Yes, there are some similarities between "History on Trial." What I've tried to do though is just lay out the actual textbook excerpts so students can make up their own mind.

MaryJG: then we go into Ecuador's past and start relating them with current events

DanGr: I find the question of "what is an important topic to teach" depends on where you are

KyleGst15: In an earlier book "History Lessons," a colleague and I looked at this very issue.

DanGr: the Philadelphia Public School System has made African American history a MANDATORY course for all students

KyleGst15: We wanted to see how history textbooks from around the world portrayed US history. To say the least, we were shocked in some cases!

DavidWe . o O (with some controversy associated with that decision in Philadelphia, I believe)

JeremG: Kyle I plan on reading History Lessons in the summer

KyleGst15: I hope you enjoy it Jerem. You might also want to look at the most recent edition of "Social Education," they have some curriculum suggestions in it for "History Lessons."

KyleGst15: Mary-do you teach US history?

MichaelH: is that the Jan/Feb issue, Kyle?

MaryJG: No, world history

KyleGst15: Yes, Mike, it is the Jan/Feb. issue.

MichaelH is scouring that as we discuss...

KyleGst15: One story I like to tell people about is that of Paul Revere.

KyleGst15: Did you know that Mr. Revere was rarely, if ever, even mentioned in US History textbooks before the 1880s?

MichaelH: that's surprising

KyleGst15: Actually, in textbooks before the 1840s they either said it was a series of bells that warned the Minutemen.

DavidWe didn't know that

JeremG: That's what great poetry can do!

JeffC wonders if they were silver bells.

DavidWe: Do you know what started the change?

KyleGst15: Or, that Samuel Dawes was the main man...and **JeremG** is right, it was Henry W. Longfellow how infiltrated our history books!

KyleGst15: It was such a popular poem that textbook authors took it as historical fact.

KyleGst15: I also found it interesting that the story of the Alamo was usually not even mentioned in textbooks before the 1900s.

MichaelH: what made that change, Kyle?

JeremG: Like Columbus and the flat earth myth myth

MichaelH hopes it wasn't John Wayne....

KyleGst15: I honestly think Hollywood (and yep, John Wayne) had a big impact on that.

MichaelH: Kyle, I wonder if you saw the same thing (Hollywood dictating history) with "Glory", and maybe "Flags of Our Fathers"?

KyleGst15: The History Channel has done some great work on history vs. Hollywood. Saw Glory, not Flags though.

JeremG: to add to Michael's comment Hollywood can be good and bad. Seeing Amazing Grace on Friday. I hope it does anti-slavery justice.

MichaelH: I have to admit, I rarely discussed the role of African Americans in the Civil War (at least not in much detail), until after I saw Glory

KyleGst15: Hollywood and mass media are very powerful forces in terms of historical understanding.

DavidWe agrees with Michael

DavidWe: It was just on tv in NYC this weekend

KyleGst15: I can't tell you how many students I have who "know" world history because of a video game they have at home!

MichaelH wonders if we are creating a generation of visual learners?

KyleGst15: I'm beginning to wonder if the day of the 1000 page textbook are slowly drifting away?

MichaelH: my bet is that they are, Kyle.

JeremG: the question is can we use this to our advantage - vid games and video, internet.

KyleGst15: Those of you that teach history, how much work do you assign from the book itself?

MichaelH: I have done a lot of work over the past few years as far as providing multimedia content in US History

MichaelH: I do some (book work), Kyle... study guides.

KyleGst15: Jerem, I suggested that schools try to incorporate some of these vid games into the classroom.

MichaelH: And of course, since the kids (and parents) have to rent the book, I feel I have to base most of my test on the chapter

MichaelH: but I really enjoy using primary source material in the classroom when I can

KyleGst15: Mike, any idea what your school spends on textbooks when they adopt them?

JeremG: I use the book for homework. I'm mostly primary and secondary source driven in the class - 98 minute classes

MichaelH: I'd hate to think about that, Kyle. We've got a student body population of about 850, and almost every student is in a social studies class.

KyleGst15: WOW! 98 minute class. Is it tough to fill the time?

JeremG: yes

MichaelH: my bet is one copy of our US History book costs around \$60-75

MichaelH: Jerem, are you on a block schedule?

JeremG: yes, 2 semesters

KyleGst15: My suggestion to teachers is that they try to have their students "write" their textbook.

MichaelH: so, you are only meeting two to three days per week with any one class?

JeremG: 98 for 90 days then new classes

JeremG: we meet every day

MichaelH: Kyle, would you have them maybe do online research for primary source material, and then use that?

KyleGst15: Yes, exactly. Turn them into mini-historians. Show them how easy bias and interpretation sneak into historical writing.

MichaelH: that's a really interesting concept... very cool

JeremG: speaking of writing textbooks do you use Wikipedia?

JeremG: I've heard of a teacher who has the students re-write a Wikipedia article based on research

JeremG: Sounded interesting

KyleGst15: Most textbooks are condensed historical encyclopedias. I think using a site like Wikipedia would, in many cases do the same thing for our students.

MaryJG: I don't let my students use wikipedia as reference

KyleGst15: And it wouldn't matter what textbook you used. If it was printed yesterday, or 100 years ago, you could show your students how interpretation has changed over time.

MaryJG: I don't consider it a reliable source

KyleGst15: Mary-why not?

MaryJG: Because it doesn't have an author, Kyle... no one to take responsibility for what they are publishing

MichaelH: Kyle, I know PBS won't allow any Wikipedia resources in lessons they publish

DanGr: many colleges do not accept Wikis for sources

KyleGst15: I completely understand, What about other online sources?

JeremG: I don't let them use it either, but I think the "history" button does what Kyle's book does in micro. Kyle any thoughts?

MichaelH: I use the Avalon Project (Yale University) a lot

KyleGst15: Jerem, can you elaborate?

MaryJG: If they have an author to back them up, or they come from a serious webpage (dot gov or dot edu)... no problem

KyleGst15: What about this. Howard Zinn has "A People's History" (very liberal) and Larry Schweikert has "A Patriots History" (very conservative). It would be interesting to use both in a classroom setting.

JeremG: the history section shows who changed each article. I think it also shows edits and additions. Check it out after this

KyleGst15: Thanks, Jerem, I will.

KyleGst15: I should also mention here about how textbooks talked about race.

JeremG: Kyle I agree this was the point of Loewen in his Lies My Teacher told Me

KyleGst15: It was not uncommon to have Native American referred to as "savages," in earlier textbooks.

MichaelH: Kyle, I wonder what your view is about "inclusion" of minority groups (like Native Americans) in general history textbooks....?

MichaelH: I did a Power Point presentation on the Civil War last year for a company in California...

MichaelH: and we actually discussed whether we should put slides in about Hispanics in the Civil War...

MichaelH: not that they don't deserve recognition if they were involved... it just seemed so out of the mainstream of what we discuss in Civil War

KyleGst15: I agree with inclusion, but not when its for trivial reasons....

KyleGst15: I want to see minorities portrayed in the broad scope of US history showing the positive attributes they contributed to society...

MichaelH: I think the California thing is that they are so diverse, and everyone wants to know that someone from their ethnic heritage was involved in everything

KyleGst15: Not, as in one textbook I looked at, as little sidebars giving us trivial information about specific individuals.

JeremG: how about inclusion of the "international context?"

DanGr: But to what extent was the 'involvement'?

KyleGst15: I'm a big fan of global education and making students globally aware....

JeremG: I was wondering what people's thoughts were on Tom Bender's recent work on Internationalizing US history?

DanGr: not familiar with it..

KyleGst15: Which is one reason my colleague and I edited the book "History Lessons." We wanted American students to learn that there is a whole other world beyond our shores.

DavidWe . o O (Global Project Based Learning is a discussion tomorrow evening at 9pm EST)

KyleGst15: Such as Ecuador.

MaryJG: Exactly!

KyleGst15: Would we be surprised at how little our students know about Ecuador and how much they DO know about us?

JeremG: Dan check it out. It will be appearing in APUS and "trickling down" in the years to follow. Kyle will have to add it to his paperback edition

DanGr: thanks....

MaryJG: Oh... many bi-lingual schools here in Ecuador have Social Studies included in their curriculum..

KyleGst15: Jerem, I'll definitely look into that!

MaryJG: and American History is one of the topics studied

KyleGst15: What we found in "History Lessons," is that the world gets heavy doses of information about the US...

KyleGst15: But unfortunately, our students learn little about the outside world.

MaryJG: Sometimes I think kids here know more about American history than Ecuadorian history

MaryJG: sad...

KyleGst15: Why do you think that is?

DavidWe . o O (cultural imperialism?)

MaryJG: hmmm.. perhaps David...

MichaelH: mass media saturation?

KyleGst15: Excellent answer David!

DavidWe bows humbly

MaryJG: but I like to include a little of both... international and national

MaryJG: go back and forth

JeremG: Which leads us to a big question - what should the curriculum be?

KyleGst15: I think it depends on what you are teaching as well as where you are teaching....

MichaelH: that's a tough one, Jerem

JeremG: Should US history be studied in a 3-4 year world history curriculum

MichaelH: My big problem (and weakness) is what I want to teach... what I am interested in

JeremG: I know someone trying this

KyleGst15: How is the 3-4 year world history course working for them?

JeremG: He thinks it is great

DanGr: Many feel content is not as important as the skills involved (reading, writing, technology)

DavidWe: both?

KyleGst15: How is it set up Jerem?

KyleGst15: Dan, where do you fall?

JeremG: They cover US as it comes up - Am Rev as part of a unit on Revolutions

DanGr: skills...

KyleGst15: Jerem, doesn't that leave big chunks of US history out?

DanGr: reading can lead to independent learning for our students

JeremG: I've never understood the debate fully. Shouldn't skills and content complement each other

MaryJG: of course!

JeremG: Kyle, yes imo it does. But I'll have to get his syllabus

DanGr: yes..but for those that teaching AP US History...how do you cover 400 years while also reinforcing skills

MichaelH perks up for this....

DavidWe . o O (test prep?)

JeremG: Dan is your course open enrollment?

DavidWe: I thought this is what AP courses were about

MichaelH: I've always thought (even on the regular US track) that 2 semesters alone weren't enough

MichaelH: what we've done over the past 15 years or so is focus only on 20th Century US history on the 11th grade level

KyleGst15: Mike-you only get breadth in 2 semesters, not much depth.

MichaelH: absolutely

MichaelH: we need a third semester

DavidWe: but, ultimately, isn't all classroom learning limited by time? The goal is to awaken an interest in any subject for further study - life-long learning?

MichaelH: As Kyle knows, I teach in a town that has a Revolutionary War heritage, and we don't cover Revolutionary War (in 11th grade US)

MichaelH: It would be like me teaching US History in Gettysburg and not covering Civil War

KyleGst15: David's right. Social Studies teachers are asked to do WAY too much, with too little time (and often too little support)

JeremG: In our school they get USI in 10th, then 90 98min. classes then a half block for second semester junior year

MichaelH: Kyle, it's just very hard to do everything we want to do with a class in an 18 week semester (and 50 minutes per day class period)

JeremG: Kyle good point about time, has incorporating the work from your books replaced other lessons/readings etc.?

KyleGst15: I've assigned sections to students and rather than me lecture on it...

KyleGst15: I have an open discussion about the various interpretations.

KyleGst15: Most students have never heard these other perspectives, so are usually intrigued.

JeremG: How does that "usually" go?

KyleGst15: I usually ask them to compare it to their current textbook...

KyleGst15: which leads to debate about what we "do" and "do not" know today.

JeremG: is this at the beginning of the year or for different units? Like Paul Revere for AmRev and Alamo for Mex-Am War

KyleGst15: I have sections in my book starting with the Vikings Exploration up to the Reagan Election, so we use it all year.

KyleGst15: I usually like to use "History Lessons" for US History II, since a foreign perspective is nice for the 20th century.

JeremG: How many years have you been doing this? And any conclusion on what most students get out of this.

KyleGst15: First year for "History in the Making," four years for "History Lessons."

KyleGst15: Yes, they gain new insight, a different perspective, critical thinking skills (debating what they thought they knew) and an interest in continued study...

KyleGst15: I've always referred to my books as "gateway" books...

DanGr: excellent point

KyleGst15: meaning, they don't give answers, but they do inspire people to do more research.

JeremG: yes, it seems they would

KyleGst15: I ask my students after reading about Paul Revere one simple question...

KyleGst15: Which textbook is right?

KyleGst15: Leads to some great debates!

DanGr: that is what I would call a success

JeremG: Mary what are your student's perceptions of 20th C US history

KyleGst15: Especially in terms of foreign textbooks....

DanGr: having students go back and forth on an issue

KyleGst15: North Korea....well, let's just say, has an interesting perspective on US History.

KyleGst15: Did you know that North Korean textbooks tell their students that the US started the Korean War...

MichaelH: I wonder if North Korea might soften its attitude after the recent agreements with the US?

JeremG: but is NK's perspective too "interesting?" or too easy?

KyleGst15: Good point Jerem!

KyleGst15: I think it's interesting, but it also tells us a lot about what they are thinking...

KyleGst15: NK only allows for ONE history textbook throughout the entire nation.

JeremG: is one textbook unusual? does France have several textbooks?

DanGr: not surprising

KyleGst15: Yes, most non-communist nations have at least a few texts to choose from.

KyleGst15: Vietnam, Cuba and NK allow for only one, published by the government.

DanGr: I have current students from South Korea in class....they give some interesting insight on their Northern neighbors

KyleGst15: Oops, add in Syria and Saudi Arabia.

JeremG: imho, we have several textbooks and at the college prep level they are roughly the same. AP has more palpable differences

KyleGst15: US textbooks are usually written by a group of editors, rarely do actual historians write them any more.

DanGr: after 9:00 in the east....I have to say this has been INTERESTING

MaryJG: wow! hard to believe!

MichaelH: just a second...

DanGr: why is that Kyle>

KyleGst15: Cheaper!

MichaelH: Kyle, I wonder if this would be a good time to show everyone the web site for "History in the Making"....

MichaelH: if they want to find out more about the book?

MichaelH reminds everyone that the web links are LIVE in the transcript

KyleGst15: Yes, they can either go to www.thenewpress.com or amazon.com. Both have reviews and write ups.

MichaelH: here's the link to Kyle's book:

http://www.thenewpress.com/index.php?option=com_title&task=view_title&metaproductid=1402

KyleGst15: Thanks everyone. It's been very interesting!

MichaelH: Kyle, I didn't want to rush... you are welcome to chat as long as you would like

MichaelH: I just wanted to make sure everyone knew where to find information about the book

DanGr: thanks Kyle

DanGr: have a great evening all.....

KyleGst15: Unfortunately, I have another meeting tomorrow that I have to prepare for. Maybe we can do this again?

MichaelH: sounds great.

DanGr: I look forward to doing this again

MichaelH: I'll get with you for a follow-up...

KyleGst15: Sounds good.

JeremG: thanks Kyle

MichaelH: maybe in April, if you're schedule is open?

JeremG: thanks everybody for a great first session. Good night.

MichaelH: glad everyone had a good time

MichaelH: please come back and join us soon