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HIST 694: Alternate Plan Paper

Secondary Source Discussion

Wineburg, Hoefflerle, Doran and Ward agree that critical source interpretation is necessary for students not only understanding but enjoying history. Wineburg's Zinn analysis/take-down showed the importance of dissecting sources, not only in the circumstances where Zinn neglected to do so, such as with the sources from which he mis-quoted a Japanese telegram at the end of WWII, but also of Zinn himself as a source. The process of this program has helped me reach a similar realization to Hoefflerle's, that students "knew the basics of how to analyze primary documents, but never thought to question or think more deeply about historical secondary sources" - and I absolutely contributed to that disconnect.¹ Perhaps because students and teachers have become accustomed to textbooks without footnotes and references embedded into them, without "archival research to thicken its narrative," his popular history presented arguments that students not only took to heart but embraced as revolutionary while historians largely ignored it because a text without references seemed nonacademic - why would they review it?² I have heard interviews with pop culture figures - Janeane Garofalo is a random but true one who comes to mind - who practically worship at Zinn's feet, as though he has exposed a part of history that traditional historians and teachers had tried to hide. She credits him with opening her eyes while at a conservative college: Somebody turned me on to Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn, and reading about them was a turning point, as was just being exposed to different ideas and different people. It actually fell more in line with what I kept inside but didn't challenge."³ (Smashing Interviews

¹ Carole Hoefflerle, "Teaching Historiography to High School and Undergraduate Students," *OAH Magazine of History* 21, no. 2 (2007): , doi:10.1093/maghis/21.2.40, 40.

² Samuel S. Wineburg, *Why Learn History (when Its Already on Your Phone)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), loc 867.

³ Melissa Parker, "Janeane Garofalo Interview: "There's Nothing Really Anyone Could Say to Penetrate Not Just Trump but the Republican Party", " *Smashing Interviews Magazine*, March 02, 2018, accessed February 10, 2019,

Magazine). This reiterates what Kyle Ward says about his students who, on the first day of class, think that history is boring because it is about dead people rather than about people who told us about their world while they were alive.⁴ While it is true that he presents underrepresented narratives and helps to challenge traditional views, and that he “has the same right as any author to choose one interpretation over the other,” readers need to be skeptical of him as a source as well.⁵ (loc 867). Secondary sources help to prompt the question, how do we know what we know?

Wineburg’s discussion of the importance of asking open-ended questions rather than Zinn’s yes-or-no dynamic dovetails with his discussion in later chapters regarding sourcing, and cautioning against the AP DBQ’s tendency to push students into cherry-picking facts to support a thesis rather than using the documents as a tool to reflect on a thoughtful prompt. When Zinn works in a binary, it uses “devices that serve to shock readers into considering the past anew;” this is a valuable way to challenge preconceived notions, but the ultimate goal would be for our students to develop the skills to do the questioning themselves, rather than to simply absorb an exciting new anti-textbook “truth.”⁶ Personally, I think that one of the skills that was most nebulous to learn but has developed significantly over my years in the classroom is my ability to ask questions that generate strong conversations, complex responses, and thought rather than regurgitation. One of my secondary source reflections hits on this: an AP Government FRQ that I initially developed was too simplistic, and students did well enough on it to make me realize it hadn’t sufficiently challenged to them. It’s a delicate balance creating questions that separate the wheat from the chaff.

<http://smashinginterviews.com/interviews/actors/janeane-garofalo-interview-theres-nothing-really-anyone-could-say-to-penetrate-not-just-trump-but-the-republican-party>.

⁴ BookTV, "Book TV: Kyle Ward, "Not Written in Stone: Learning and Unlearning American History ", YouTube, September 14, 2010, , accessed February 10, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j9y34M31b0Q&feature=youtu.be>, 2:00.

⁵ Wineburg, *Why Learn History*, loc 867.

⁶ *Ibid*, loc 946.

Hoefflerle's suggestions for helping students analyze secondary sources mirrors Wineburg's observations in examining fact-checkers evaluating sources. For example, when she suggests that students uncover personal information about an author "which may have shaped their interpretation of the topic. They can normally find this information either in the text itself, or the library, or online through a Google search of the author's name," it is similar to the horizontal-nature of the secondary-source evaluation that fact checkers perform as they cross-reference information, individuals, and organizations on a page with other reliable websites.⁷ Reading her article made me realize that an activity that I did with my government students just yesterday would benefit from this analysis. Students were all assigned different news sources, and they shared out the source's headline and three details about Trump's SOTU, with the intention of evaluating the language they used and the parts of the speech they referenced for potential indicators of bias. A stronger way to evaluate this would have been to research the authors and the sources themselves rather than simply using the article as a case study. I hope to follow-up today rather than let that be a missed opportunity to teach critical consumption - in fact, perhaps it's better if I don't assign them a news source, but rather to ask students to find a source and use that as a jumping off point for what they personally see as reliable. Ward, Wineburg, Doran and Hoefflerle emphasize the need to evaluate historiography, and the challenge of that in the classroom is both the background knowledge required to effectively do so, as well as the time required to consider multiple sources - to read textbooks across eras, museum exhibit summaries versus newspaper accounts, and other sources that might show changing interpretations over time. Maybe we can talk Wineburg into creating such a resource to complement his primary source material at Stanford?

Works Cited

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⁷ Hoefflerle, "Teaching Historiography," 41.

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