

Uncoverage: Toward a Signature Pedagogy for the History Survey

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History professors say the darnedest things. Like the one who summed up his teaching philosophy declaring, “If I said it, that means they learned it!” Or the colleague who scoffed at “trendy” educational reforms because, as she put it, “You can’t teach students how to think until you’ve taught them what to think.” Then there was the time an eminent historian rose to speak after my presentation on how *not* to teach the history survey. “I may be doing it wrong,” conceded this gifted, award-winning teacher, “but I am doing it in the proper and customary way.”¹

The professor’s droll remark points to where we stand today in the teaching of history surveys, perhaps especially the U.S. history survey. Generations of undergraduates can testify that introductory surveys are taught in a “proper and customary way.” “First you listen to a lecture, then you read a textbook, then you take a test,” is how a student described her survey to me, adding, significantly, “It wasn’t different, really, from my other introductory courses.” Here historians flirt with calamity. When the only history course most people ever take from a professionally trained historian tempts students to believe there is little difference between history and sociology or history and biology except for the facts to be learned, it is not surprising that teachers occasionally sense they might be “doing it wrong.”²

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¹ He later told me he was quoting George Bernard Shaw.

² On the “disciplinary homogenization” caused by introductory courses, see Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia, 2001), 79–80. Evidence for a “proper and customary way” to teach surveys can be seen in a recent study of eight hundred U.S. history survey course syllabi posted on the World Wide Web. See Daniel J. Cohen, “By the Book: Assessing the Place of Textbooks in U.S. Survey Courses,” *Journal of American History*, 91 (March 2005), 1405–15. For a report on the “remarkable stability and uniformity in the design and structure of the U.S. and European history introductory courses” based on a 2003 nationwide survey, see Robert Townsend, “College Board Examines Survey Course,” *OAH Newsletter*, 33 (Aug. 2005), 1. On the roles, functions, and consequences of textbooks in introductory courses in other disciplines, see Paul W. Richardson, “Reading and Writing from Textbooks in Higher Education: A Case Study from Economics,” *Studies in Higher Education*, 29 (Aug. 2004), 505–21.

The feeling is as old as it is accurate. For as long as there have been survey courses, some teachers have suspected that the vacant expressions on students' faces (so famously portrayed in the "Anyone? . . . Anyone?" history-class scene in the movie *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*) are not so much indications of the students' shortcomings as predictable products of the survey itself, whose basic design requires professors and textbooks to pass on essential information about a historical period. This emphasis on "coverage" accounts for the course's trademark routines—earnest lectures, stolid textbooks, decontextualized assessments, flagrant and routine violations of Auerbach's law (as in Arnold "Red" Auerbach, the distinguished learning theorist and coach of National Basketball Association [NBA] legends, who summarized his teaching philosophy by declaring, "It's not what you say; it's what they hear").³ Some teachers have always suspected that to make the survey "a serious house . . . proper to grow wise in," to borrow imagery from Philip Larkin, it would not be enough to juice up the lectures and write better textbooks. Nor would it be enough to tinker with content by assigning a few novels, or rearranging the chronology, or reorganizing lectures around a set of new themes. For at least a century, some have asserted that nothing less will do than a complete redesign of the survey, from its basic assumptions up.⁴

So when I claim that the typical, coverage-oriented survey is a wrongheaded way to introduce students to the goodness and power of history, I am not saying anything outrageous or new. But pedagogical inertia happens. While everything else touching the survey has changed—think back to the days of the presidential synthesis, when classroom technology meant pull-down maps and chalkboards, when tweedy professors lectured to what back then were called "freshmen"—the old routines of coverage remain firmly in place. Thus the problem that bedeviled our teachers and their teachers before them continues to vex us today: What is to be done with the history survey?

I hope it is not useless to argue yet again for significant changes in the way we teach these most important of history courses. True, obstacles that defeated earlier calls for reform have not gone away. Professional reward structures continue to discourage careful inquiry into the problems of teaching. Institutional constraints still make large classes obligatory, while old folk beliefs about learning continue to be impervious to cognitive science. Neither do current political trends favor reform, unless one believes that narrow testing regimes and a return to "traditional" American history should define the horizon of what is possible.

But other developments are more encouraging. Everywhere, the mystique of coverage is abating. Teachers no longer believe they can cover everything of importance, and more feel the awkwardness of teaching about social differences in the past while disregarding what this knowledge might mean for the construction of authority and teacher-student interactions in present-day classrooms. Meanwhile, a wired student generation sends up its own drumbeat for change, tap-tapping their laptops, MP3 players, and PDAs in battles

³ *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, dir. John Hughes (Paramount, 1986); "Red Auerbach: True Stories and NBA Legends," *Morning Edition*, National Public Radio, Nov. 2, 2004.

⁴ For old debates over the introductory course among historians at Stanford University, see Larry Cuban, *How Scholars Trumped Teachers: Change without Reform in University Curriculum, Teaching, and Research, 1890–1990* (New York, 1999). For recent programmatic calls to amend the survey, see David Trask, "Rethinking the Survey Course," *OAH Newsletter*, 30 (May 2002), 3–6; and Peter Stearns, *Meaning over Memory: Recasting the Teaching of Culture and History* (Chapel Hill, 1993), 172–205. For recent efforts to improve history instruction, see Allan E. Yarema, "A Decade of Debate: Improving Content and Interest in History Education," *History Teacher*, 35 (May 2002), 389–98.

against classroom tedium. Checking e-mail in class is rude and immature, but it is also a predictable response to a worn-out pedagogy that no longer has a place in the history survey. Now that cognitive scientists have developed a basic consensus on the principles of learning, and now that historians are playing a significant role in efforts to field-test and expand this research through a scholarship of teaching and learning, it is a good moment to remind ourselves what the introductory survey could be (and what it already is for some teachers) if we replaced generic pedagogies of coverage with teaching and learning marked by the distinctive signature of history.

This essay will describe such a course, a U.S. history survey I have been teaching and studying since becoming a Carnegie scholar in 1999.⁵ But my course is not unique. Other courses laid out along similar lines are being developed by teachers at many different types of institutions.⁶ So much experimentation is going on, in fact, that one wonders whether historians might not be close to establishing a new “signature pedagogy” for the introductory history course.

What is a signature pedagogy? And what would it look like in a history survey?

Consider the distinctive method used for teaching and learning in a typical law school. In the case-dialogue method, a law professor calls on a student to summarize a case. If the summary of essential facts is incoherent or factually wrong, public embarrassment follows. If the answer is lucid, the student is not yet let off the hook; now the professor grills the student to determine the limits of what he or she knows, often by changing the facts of the case into hypothetical scenarios—“hypos”—for which students are asked to rule on the new facts and explain their reasoning. It is a demanding classroom routine that is part Socratic dialogue, part Spanish Inquisition. The goal is to teach beginning students to think like lawyers, which means less a perfect recall of little-known cases than a habitual fidelity to established law. So when a student inevitably complains, “I know that’s what the law says, but it hardly seems fair,” the professor seizes the opportunity to correct the student’s untutored inclination to view legal questions as a problem of justice or fairness, reminding the class that they are training to become lawyers, not ethicists or politicians. Some professors do this more gently than others, and every professor contributes a personal style to her or his course. But the basic pedagogy for teaching law students is everywhere the same.

And so it goes across the professions, observes Lee S. Shulman, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, who for the last ten years has been directing studies on preparation for the professions. Medical schools train physicians through the bedside ritual of clinical rounds; engineering faculty put students together in collaborative-design studios; theological seminaries mingle study with prayer and community service. It is a hallmark of professional education that each discipline has devel-

⁵ The Carnegie Scholars Program brings together outstanding faculty from a variety of disciplines and institutions committed to investigating and documenting significant issues in the teaching and learning of their fields. For information about individual scholar projects, go to the Carnegie Scholars list at <<http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/CASTL/highered/scholarlist.htm>> (Nov. 22, 2005).

⁶ Recent examples of innovation in history surveys can be found in Peter N. Stearns, “Getting Specific about Training in Historical Analysis: A Case Study in World History,” in *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, ed. Peter N. Stearns, Peter Seixas, and Sam Wineburg (New York, 2000), 419–36; Stuart D. Sears, “Reinventing the Survey: Pedagogical Strategies for Engagement,” *AHA Perspectives*, 43 (Feb. 2005), 21; Julie Roy Jeffrey, “The Survey, Again,” *OAHS Magazine of History*, 17 (April 2003), 52–54; and Russell Olwell, “Building Higher-Order Historical Thinking Skills in a College Survey Class,” *Teaching History*, 27 (Spring 2002), 22–32.

oped characteristic forms of teaching and learning that, like the name of a person written in his own hand, are done in the same way from teacher to teacher and institution to institution. These signature pedagogies, as Shulman refers to them, disclose important information about the personality of a disciplinary field—its values, knowledge, and manner of thinking—almost, perhaps, its total world view. Shulman's team of scholars finds that signature pedagogies are more common in fields like law and medicine than in the liberal arts, perhaps because teachers in the professions must answer to practitioners for what students know. "Knowing" in the professions means more than filling in the blanks with correct answers—it refers to what a person can *do*. For reasons Shulman and scholars at the Carnegie Foundation are continuing to study, signature pedagogies make a difference in shaping future performance and passing on the values and hopes of the members of disciplinary fields.⁷

A signature pedagogy, then, is what beginning students in the professions have but history beginners typically do not: ways of being taught that require them to do, think, and value what practitioners in the field are doing, thinking, and valuing. Which is exactly the way it should be, some will stoutly maintain. Professional schools are graduate schools. How could instructional methods intended for graduate students possibly work for novices who lack even basic information about the past? Facts must come first, a lot of history teachers will say. Only after a groundwork of factual knowledge has been laid can students go on to more advanced interpretive work. In this commonsense view of the matter, history can lay claim to a signature pedagogy of its own—the research seminar—but this method is reserved for upper-level students and those pursuing advanced degrees.

The "facts first" view is based on half-truths that deserve to be taken seriously. Historical facts are important, and instruction should be fitted to the level of the students. But defenders of traditional survey methods who want students to know certain things—what Reconstruction was, or why slavery happened, or who fought whom in World War II—risk the negation of their objectives by a very large error. Many of the assumptions historians make about learning have been shown by cognitive scientists to be quite wrong, including what Sam Wineburg calls the "attic theory" of cognition. As it happens, people do not collect facts the way homeowners collect furniture, storing pieces in the attic for use at a later time. Teachers may like to think they are "furnishing the mind," but since the late 1950s, investigations of human mental functioning have shown that this metaphor falls apart when taken too literally. Facts are not like furniture at all; they are more like dry ice, disappearing at room temperature. Cognitive science has much to teach history teachers about memory, about the relation between facts and thinking, and about the nature of historical thinking itself.⁸ Or we could listen to our own. When Charles G. Sellers heard University of California, Berkeley, alumni reflecting on the value of their history courses, he resolved to abandon his "facts first" survey. In an address to the 1969 meeting of the American Historical Association, Sellers explained why:

⁷ Lee S. Shulman, "Signature Pedagogies in the Professions," *Daedalus*, 134 (Summer 2005), 52–59; Lee S. Shulman, "Pedagogies of Uncertainty," *Liberal Learning*, 91 (Spring 2005), 18–25.

⁸ For summaries of cognition as it relates to learning, see John D. Bransford, Ann L. Brown, and Rodney R. Cocking, eds., *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School* (Washington, 1999), 8–16, 30, 147–51, 225–26; and Cameron Fincher, "Learning Theory and Research," in *Teaching and Learning in the College Classroom*, ed. Kenneth A. Feldman and Michael B. Paulsen (Needham Heights, 1998), 57–80. Sam Wineburg referred to the "attic theory" of cognition in conversation with me in 2000.

The notion that students must first be given facts and then at some distant time in the future will “think” about them is both a cover-up and a perversion of pedagogy. . . . One does not collect facts he does not need, hang on to them, and then stumble across the propitious moment to use them. One is first perplexed by a problem and *then* makes use of facts to achieve a solution.⁹

Cognitive scientists have shown Sellers to be right. The problem with defenders of traditional surveys, then, is not that they care about facts too much but that they do not care about facts enough to inquire into the nature of how people learn them. Built on wobbly, lay theories of human cognition, coverage-oriented surveys must share in the blame for Americans’ deplorable ignorance of history.¹⁰

The late Roland Marchand wondered: Why are historians so incurious about learning?¹¹ For historians who are also teachers, not being curious about learning is an uncharacteristic failure of the scholarly imagination—and perhaps the moral imagination too, as when professors write off students who learn little from lectures or have not excelled in school, in short, the ones who are not like themselves. The distance historians traditionally have kept from research on learning is obvious in the way historians talk about teaching, as was apparent several years ago in a round table discussion of the U.S. history survey published in this journal. The participants, prominent scholars and gifted teachers all, talked cogently and perceptively about aspects of their teaching but not a single reference was made to serious studies of cognition, learning, historical thinking, or course design.¹² The problem with this kind of autodidactic conversation is that although able professors will develop a certain wisdom of practice, a knowledge based on hunches, personal experience, and limited scholarly reading will also lead them to make what expert authorities regard as appalling blunders and howlers. Preoccupied with *what* to teach while ignoring the equally important matter of *how* to teach it, historians have been aptly described by David Pace as “amateurs in the operating room.”¹³

But change is coming. The scholarship of teaching and learning is bringing home to historians valuable knowledge about learning in our own language and journals.

Research-based studies of exceptional history teachers show that whereas no two accomplished teachers teach in exactly the same way, effective history teaching is oriented toward what Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe call “uncoverage.”¹⁴ In traditional surveys “to cover” a subject means “to travel over” or “to go the length of” a period. But coverage has other meanings too; it can mean “to conceal,” “to cover up,” or “to throw a blanket

⁹ Charles G. Sellers here paraphrased words by another scholar, S. Samuel Shermis. See Charles G. Sellers, “Is History on the Way out of the Schools and Do Historians Care?,” *Social Education*, 33 (May 1969), 511.

¹⁰ Sam Wineburg, “Crazy for History,” *Journal of American History*, 90 (March 2004), 1413–14. For a summary of studies demonstrating that students remember very little from lecture-based, coverage-oriented courses, see L. Dee Fink, *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses* (San Francisco, 2003), 2–4.

¹¹ Roland Marchand, “Further Comment on Daniel D. Trifan’s ‘Active Learning: A Critical Examination,’” *AHA Perspectives*, 35 (March 1997), 29.

¹² Gary Kornblith and Carol Lasser, eds., “Teaching the American History Survey at the Opening of the Twenty-First Century: A Round Table Discussion,” *Journal of American History*, 87 (March 2001), 1409–41.

¹³ David Pace, “The Amateur in the Operating Room: History and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning,” *American Historical Review*, 109 (Oct. 2004), 1171–92.

¹⁴ Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design* (Alexandria, 1998), 98–114. For a summary of research on effective history teachers, see Richard J. Paxton and Sam Wineburg, “Expertise and the Teaching of History,” in *Routledge International Companion to Education*, ed. Bob Moon, Sally Brown, and Miriam Ben-Peretz (New York, 2000), 855–64.

over” something. Covering up history as historians know it is one thing that traditional surveys do very well—hiding what it really means to be good at history.¹⁵ But it does not have to be this way. Survey instructors should aim to uncover history. We should be designing classroom environments that expose the very things hidden away by traditional survey instruction: the linchpin ideas of historical inquiry that are not obvious or easily comprehended; the inquiries, arguments, assumptions, and points of view that make knowledge what it is for practitioners of our discipline; the cognitive contours of history as an epistemological domain.

The theory and research justifying uncoverage approaches are already in place. What we still need are professionwide conversations about how to translate theory into good practice. To fire up that debate, I offer here an example of what uncoverage looks like in practice.

What follows is a description of a survey course I teach called “U.S. History: World War II to the Present.”¹⁶ The ten-week course is taught to thirty-five students but would be adaptable to larger classes with minor adjustments and the help of teaching assistants. It is not my claim that the course in all its details constitutes a signature pedagogy for the history survey. It is on the deeper structures of the course—the goals, student performances, and course routines—that history’s signature is inscribed.

“U.S. History: World War II to the Present” does not actually begin with World War II. Rather, my survey begins with a prologue or overture in which students consider the nature of historical study itself. Taking place over four class meetings, the prologue is designed around questions and exercises meant to uncover important aspects of the historical enterprise: What is history? Why study it? What problems trouble historical knowledge? What stories, tropes, and patterns do people typically see in the past?

Committing time to problems normally reserved for historiography courses seems justified by Sam Wineburg’s observation that “the problem with students is not that they don’t know enough about history. The problem is that they don’t know what history is in the first place.”¹⁷ Students come to college thinking that history is what one finds in a textbook: a stable, authoritative body of knowledge that, when remembered, somehow makes the world a better place. The prologue features exercises designed to expose the inadequacies of such a view. For example, when students write brief “histories” of a civil disturbance in the Spike Lee movie *Do the Right Thing*, they are surprised to learn just how different people’s interpretations of an event can be, even when everyone works from the same evidence.¹⁸ Historical knowledge, the students learn, is fraught with difficulties, which means that the stories and claims made by historians will always be contestable. This is a truth expert historians often assume everyone knows, but in fact they do not—it

¹⁵ Sam Wineburg, “Teaching the Mind Good Habits,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 11, 2003, p. B20; Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*, 12–17; Robert B. Bain, “Into the Breach: Using Research and Theory to Shape History Instruction,” in *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History*, ed. Stearns, Seixas, and Weinburg, 334–36. On what it means to be “good” at history, the landmark text is Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*, 3–27, 63–112.

¹⁶ For more about the course, including all activities and assignments, answers to frequently asked questions, and evidence I have collected to study how well the course meets its goals, readers are directed to the course Web site at <<http://www.indiana.edu/~jah/textbooks/2006/calder/>>. I invite critique and welcome others to help themselves to anything they please, as I have done with other teachers’ ideas—there is no plagiarism among pedagogues.

¹⁷ Sam Wineburg, “Probing the Depths of Students’ Historical Knowledge,” *AHA Perspectives*, 30 (March 1992), 1.

¹⁸ Bain, “Into the Breach,” 336–37; *Do the Right Thing*, dir. Spike Lee (40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks, 1989).

has to be uncovered. My prologue does not give students a deep understanding of history. But it is enough to expose students' basic misconceptions about the nature of history and prepare them mentally for the hard work that is to come.

After the prologue, the remaining weeks of the course are given to eight problem areas spanning the course's chronological boundaries. Beginning with World War II, we examine "Origins of the Cold War," "Society and Culture in the Fifties," "The Civil Rights Movement," "Kennedy/Johnson Liberalism," "Vietnam," "Sixties Cultural Rebellion," "1980s Culture Wars," and "The End of the Cold War." Each topic is given three class meetings, with each of the three devoted to a different kind of study: the first to visual inquiry, the second to critical inquiry, the third to moral inquiry. I make no attempt to cover the topics thoroughly or to provide a seamless, authoritative narrative or argument. Rather, the problem areas become opportunities for students and teacher to do history themselves, to encounter the past in all its messy, uncertain, and elusive wonder. Can beginning students learn to do history the way professionals do it? Of course not. But my studies have found they can learn to execute a basic set of moves crucial to the development of historical mindedness. I want students to learn six such moves, or cognitive habits: questioning, connecting, sourcing, making inferences, considering alternate perspectives, and recognizing limits to one's knowledge, all in the service of understanding American history since 1945.¹⁹ Here is how it works.

Historical thinking, like other forms of disciplinary thinking, begins with clear-eyed wonder before the world. But questioning is an extraordinarily difficult skill for most students, probably because for their whole lives teachers and textbooks have posed the questions for them ("Write an essay on the following question . . ."). Feeding students a steady diet of other people's questions is a sure-fire prescription for mental dyspepsia. So the first move students need to learn is that of asking good historical questions. To this end the first meeting in every unit is designed to intensify students' desire to inquire.

I find that films are good for this purpose. A well-chosen film orients students to basic information about a subject and motivates them to take an empathic leap into the past. Films make good launch pads for thought as they provide interpretations students can push against with their own questions ("Was World War II really a 'good war' like Frank Capra said?"). Most of the films screened in my course are documentaries, with an occasional historical Hollywood drama or period propaganda film on the schedule. On film day my objective is to teach students how to learn from film, how to view moving images with an awareness of the manipulations involved. Visual literacy is essential to both liberal education and the study of the recent past, for which the moving image is an important source of information. But in addition to literacy and student motivation, my ultimate objective on the first day of each unit is to create an environment so rich in information and so charged with interesting problems that students who are inert in the face of lectures and textbooks will be stirred to ask a few historical questions. After the film awakens their capacity for wonder, I then send students out to do what historically minded people do: follow a question that takes them beyond what they already know.

Following the meeting given to visual inquiry, students prepare for the second meeting in the unit—we call it "history workshop"—by examining primary documents pertaining

¹⁹ For definitions of historical thinking, see Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*, 3–27, 63–112; and Kathryn T. Spoehr and Luther W. Spoehr, "Learning to Think Historically," *Educational Psychologist*, 29 (Spring 1994), 71–77.

to the week's subject (I use document readers for this purpose). Students write three- to five-page essays on questions of their choosing using the evidence they have examined. When the history workshop convenes, this essay is everyone's ticket to class—no one is allowed entry without it. This requirement has a marvelous effect on the quality of class discussions. It ensures that everyone not only has read the documents but also has read them closely enough to construct a historical argument, thus making each student the class expert on at least one facet of the subject. At the beginning of class, students submit notecards with the questions that prompted their essays. While I collate the cards into piles of similar questions, students pass their papers around and read what others have written. When I am done sorting the questions, the papers are handed back, and the history workshop begins.

This meeting has two objectives. My first goal is to facilitate discussion of the questions students have brought. The second goal is to introduce each week a new intellectual move characteristic of the way historians think. I work toward these goals in the manner of a coach—but not like a tennis coach standing on one side of the net opposite a group of students on the other, volleying back and forth. Rather, on workshop day I work like a soccer coach, throwing questions into play from my position on the sideline and then watching as students kick the questions around, advancing toward tentative conclusions as they learn to play the fun yet serious game of academic discourse. As the discussion proceeds, I look for opportunities to call time-out, stopping intellectual play to conduct short clinics on elements of analytic reading, persuasive argument, or historical thinking. For example, on the very first workshop day I almost always have to coach students to respond to each other's contributions with a version of what I call the "But" move and Gerald Graff calls "Arguespeak": "She said X, but I say Y."²⁰ Later I coach them to ask the useful little question: "What is the evidence or reason for believing what you just said?" Until intellectual moves like these are uncovered, students rarely talk about history the way historians do with each other. That is because they have been schooled to think that being good at history means being ready to supply a correct answer. It takes some doing to get them to believe that a good question is worth a dozen hasty opinions.

As it happens, questioning is the first of six cognitive moves I introduce one at a time in the history workshop days following the prologue. Until all have been explained, practiced, and practiced some more, the papers students bring to the workshops are really quite *terrible*. And why shouldn't they be? No one has ever made plain to them how one makes sense of historical texts. With so much to do in the workshop meetings, it never happens that we cover all the questions students bring to class. This, too, is an important lesson about historical investigation. Students come to understand what a difficult, untidy business it is to create historical knowledge—what is covered up behind the neat, handsome pages of a history textbook. Writing their own histories, students come to understand what history is not: a definitive story, facts strung together, a clear-cut and painlessly acquired knowledge of the past.

Writing their own histories primes students to read what professional historians have written. So for the third meeting in a unit, students read selections from two histories of the United States: Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* and Paul Johnson's

²⁰ Gerald Graff, *Clueless in Academe: How Schooling Obscures the Life of the Mind* (New Haven, 2003), 22–25, 156–72.

A History of the American People.²¹ These “untextbooks” support the goal of uncoverage in several ways. Their status as best sellers means students will be learning to think discerningly about the kind of popular history they are most likely to encounter in future years as adults. Students appreciate that the texts are inexpensive, while I appreciate that Zinn and Johnson between them will cover most of the topics a historically literate person should be familiar with for our period. Thus if the 1954 Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) military coup in Guatemala does not happen to come up in class, students still will have read two accounts of it in Zinn and Johnson (*two* accounts—that is critically important). Even though these histories are completely lacking in charts, sidebars, pictures, and Web support, students actually read these histories and even hold onto them after the course is over, rarely selling them back to the campus bookstore. Why? Because it is not dry coverage that drives the two histories but compelling moral visions expressed in provocative arguments. When students read Zinn’s and Johnson’s strikingly different interpretations of American history, their attention is drawn by the thrill of a quarrel, then captured and held by the gravity of each author’s *telos*. They must now confront, inescapably, an essential feature of historical mindedness—that history is “an argument without end.” A textbook can *say* this, of course. But it cannot repeal Auerbach’s law.

Our third class day, then, is for inquiry and reflection on the meaning of past events. Class begins with a quiz on the main points of the assigned readings. To students who have been taught to read textbooks for information, it is a revelation to discover that historians are not just storytellers but case makers too. Initially, they struggle to recognize the main claim of a reading. But by the end of the term, the recurring quizzes have made most students adept at recognizing historical arguments. With the quiz out of the way, I lead the class in examining the contrasting interpretations of the two historians, comparing what they say with conclusions we have reached in our previous workshop. The histories by Zinn and Johnson become prompts for inquiring into the moral significance of historical events: what the past means for our ethics and self-knowledge and how knowledge of the past shapes our general understanding of the world (and vice versa).

In this third meeting I exercise greater control than in the second, sometimes lecturing for minutes at a time on the interpretive questions I want to consider that day. But by the third meeting students can be so primed with questions and historical arguments of their own that sometimes it is impossible to talk uninterrupted for long. When students see their own arguments from the history workshop showing up in the works of professional historians, their self-confidence grows. At the same time, students are more likely to read authorities with a critical eye because the historical arguments they wrote from primary documents have given them an understanding of the choices confronting Zinn and Johnson when they created their histories—choices to ask certain questions but not others, to emphasize certain themes while ignoring other topics, to reason from anecdotes or quantitative data.

At the end of the course, students complete a final assignment that calls for them to pull together everything they have learned. With Zinn and Johnson in mind, they write a memo to Sen. Robert C. Byrd arguing for one of the books as the best history to adopt for a program of adult education. It is an impossible assignment. Both books are arguably good histories, or bad ones. But impossible tasks call for the utmost one is capable of.

²¹ Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States* (New York, 1980); Paul Johnson, *A History of the American People* (New York, 1998).

That is the point of this summative assignment: to see what students have learned to do after ten weeks of training. What kinds of questions are they capable of asking? Can they recognize connections between disparate sources of information? How do they read texts: as neutral sources of information or as human-stained palimpsests of authorial limitation and intention requiring careful deciphering and positioning in a social context? How well do they marshal evidence to support claims about U.S. history? Do they consider arguments and perspectives different from their own? What is the quality of their critical self-knowledge—are they humble about what they claim to know? These are the six cognitive moves the course is designed to support. My survey uncovers history only imperfectly, but the thinking I see in even the worst of these papers convinces me students are learning more now than in the lecture and textbook surveys I offered years ago.

Teachers often fear to break from coverage-oriented pedagogies because they worry that with less content being covered, students will know less about the past.²² This fear is not groundless, but it is usually exaggerated. The largest studies completed to date of teaching and learning in the sciences show that stepping away from lectures and textbooks, far from condemning students to knowing fewer facts about a subject, appears to lead to better understanding of foundational knowledge.²³ We lack comparable studies of understanding and remembering for students in history courses. But in my department, when several of my colleagues and I converted our survey courses from coverage to uncoverage, we noted that the pass/fail rate of students taking a licensing examination for certifications as history teachers remained unchanged. Apparently, our uncoverage orientation is not cheating students of the ability to do well on traditional multiple-choice history tests.

But the kinds of learning promoted in uncoverage courses are not measurable with bubble tests. To find out if my students become more adept at the six cognitive habits taught in my survey, I designed a simple assessment procedure employing think-aloud protocols to compare what students were able to do with historical documents before and after taking my course. Think alouds are a widely used research tool developed by cognitive psychologists to study how people solve problems. In my think alouds, participants were trained to give voice to any and all thoughts as they attempted to make sense of seven to ten short historical documents on the battle of the Little Big Horn (before the course) and the Haymarket bombing (after the course). Their verbalized thoughts were recorded and transcribed for later analysis to determine patterns of cognition used to make sense of the documents. In fields such as reading comprehension, mathematics, chemistry, and history, think alouds have proved very useful for identifying what constitutes “expert knowledge” as distinguished from the thinking processes of beginners in the field. But in my pair of studies, I used think alouds to measure changes in thinking patterns over time for selected individuals enrolled in my survey.

²² Daniel D. Trifan, “Active Learning: A Critical Examination,” *AHA Perspectives*, 35 (March 1997), 23; Sean Wilentz, “The Past Is Not a Process,” *New York Times*, April 20, 1996, p. E15.

²³ Thus far, comparative studies have mostly targeted the sciences. Two important studies are R. R. Hake, “Interactive-Engagement vs. Traditional Methods: A Six Thousand Student Survey of Mechanics Test Data for Introductory Physics Courses,” *American Journal of Physics*, 66 (Jan. 1998), 64–74; and S. E. Lewis and J. E. Lewis, “Departing from Lectures: An Evaluation of a Peer-Led Guided Inquiry Alternative,” *Journal of Chemical Education*, 82 (no. 1, 2005), 135–39. A thoughtful summary of research on active learning can be found in M. Prince, “Does Active Learning Work? A Review of the Research,” *Journal of Engineering Education*, 93 (July 2004), 223–31.

Of course, I could have studied the cognitive development of students by comparing papers written early and late in the course, and I did. But as finished products, papers conceal as much as they reveal. The advantage of think alouds over graded student work is that they allow one to observe the process of thinking in a raw, unvarnished state. Think alouds reveal not only what a student thinks but also how she came to think it. Think alouds expose the stumblings, the hesitations, the blind alleys, the good ideas entertained and abandoned, the inner workings of a mind trying to make sense of the past. Listening to my students think out loud as they tried to make sense of documents is the single most eye-opening experience I have had in my years as a teacher.

What my studies revealed is that even in a short, ten-week course students on average make modest to occasionally dramatic gains in all six aspects of historical thinking taught in the course. The ability to formulate historical questions led all other areas of improvement (though ironically, and somewhat disturbingly, evidence from post-course surveys indicates that students consistently rate questioning as the *least* valuable skill to be learned in the course). Another finding from my investigations may reassure those who worry that students will react negatively to departures from the comfortable routines of old-school surveys: while students in my survey complain that uncoverage increases their work load, they overwhelmingly prefer uncoverage to more traditional course designs, and they report that their regard for history and desire to study it increases over the length of the course. For more about student learning in my survey and how I went about studying it, please visit the course Web site at <<http://www.indiana.edu/~jah/textbooks/2006/calder/>>.

To return now to my theme of a signature pedagogy: Why does my course (or any course) make a difference for students? Some say what matters most is that teachers have a thorough knowledge of their subject. Others say enthusiasm is the truly indispensable thing, while still others say it is the ability to project an ethic of care. All of these qualities matter. But when students reflect on their experiences with my course they point most often to design features shared by all signature pedagogies, elements Lee Shulman suggests may explain why these ways of teaching are so effective for learning.²⁴

First, signature pedagogies unfold from big questions that students are likely to find meaningful, questions that are useful for uncovering how expert practitioners in a discipline think and act. In the case of my survey, instead of asking, What does the textbook say? or What does the professor say?, my course begins with an important question students are already asking—What is the story of American history?—and goes from there. Who are Americans? What have we accomplished? How do we judge what we have done? Are things getting better or worse, or are metanarratives even possible to believe in the first place? I have learned from one of my prologue assignments (“Write a two-page history of the United States, without looking up any facts.”) what Peter Seixas and others have pointed out: students who have been making sense of their society and national identity since before preschool have been greatly influenced by heritage tales and myth-history, which is why the history survey must start there.²⁵ My course takes what students already know and tests it against a different way of knowing the past, the way profession-

²⁴ Shulman, “Signature Pedagogies in the Professions,” 56–58.

²⁵ Peter Seixas, “The Purpose of Teaching Canadian History,” *Canadian Social Studies*, 36 (Winter 2002) <http://www.quasar.ualberta.ca/css/Css_36_2/index36_2.htm#Articles> (Nov. 22, 2005); David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York, 1996).

ally trained historians construct knowledge. So the second big question of the course is: How do historians know what they claim to know? And the third question follows from the second: Why would one want to think the way historians think? Every element of the course directly addresses one or more of these big questions.

A second characteristic of signature pedagogies is that the intellectual project envisioned by their big questions is advanced through a standard pattern of instructional routines. Routines are essential for learning. Routines provide students with a necessary scaffolding of instructional and social support as they struggle to learn the “unnatural act” of historical thinking. Teachers often say that “critical” or “historical” thinking is a goal of their course. But without effective routines, the goal is unreachable for all but a few students. Professors who ask students to read primary documents know that the exercise can often be a frustrating experience. In fact, good intentions may lead to unintended consequences, as when students become so frustrated with multiple sources of text that they disengage from the course, or worse, form serious misconceptions about historical analysis, believing that primary documents have more inherent veracity than other documents or that one person’s perspective is as good as another.²⁶ In my early attempts to have students work with primary documents, my efforts misfired because I did not realize how much scaffolding it takes for students to learn the unfamiliar, even off-putting habits of mind historians can take for granted. I thought it would be enough if students watched me model historical thinking in class, but this assumption proved to be terribly wrong. Students need models, but it is routines that form habits. This is why I limit the number of cognitive moves uncovered in my course to six and give students repeated opportunities to practice them in their weekly workshop essays. Recurring assignments that require students to make sense of primary documents are crucial for learning the signature of history.

My survey supports student learning with two levels of routines. On the day-to-day level there is what I refer to as “batting practice”—repeated exercises like the main-point quizzes and the primary-document essays that teach specific skills. At the larger level of the overall course design are the routines of “visual inquiry” for questioning, “critical inquiry” for constructing historical knowledge, and “moral inquiry” for reflective application. The pattern of three integrated course meetings is very popular with students. It satisfies their need for stable expectations while appealing to different learning styles. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that hybrid pedagogies like mine, combining student-centered, active-learning approaches (the history workshop meeting) with teacher-centered approaches (the first and third days of each unit) are more effective at producing deep understanding than either approach alone.²⁷

Finally, as with other signature pedagogies, my course requires regular, public student performances. “Your students are so busy,” observed a colleague visiting my class on a workshop day. What he saw was students working collaboratively, like students in an

²⁶ Bain, “Into the Breach,” 334–36; Susan A. Stahl, Cynthia R. Hynd, Bruce K. Britton, and Mary M. McNish, “What Happens When Students Read Multiple Source Documents in History?” <http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/go/clic/nrrc/hist_r45.html> (Nov. 22, 2005). See also results from a three-year Spencer/MacArthur Foundation-supported study of professional development for California history teachers and how it affected student learning: Kathleen Medina et al., “How Do Students Understand the Discipline of History as an Outcome of Teachers’ Professional Development?” (2000). For copies of this report contact Kathleen Medina at <kmmedina@ucla.edu>.

²⁷ S. Nadkarni, “Instructional Methods and Mental Models of Students: An Empirical Investigation,” *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 2 (no. 4, 2003), 335–51.

engineering-design studio, examining each other's papers for examples of the cognitive move introduced at the previous workshop and making suggestions for how to improve each other's work. On other days my class looks more like law school, as I cold-call on students to source a document or to respond to claims made by Zinn or Johnson. At times we even do something a little like clinical rounds, as when students huddle around a document and I ask the group for an opinion on what problems of interpretation confront us in this source. Following Shulman, it seems to me that active performances like these are important for at least two reasons. To begin with, they push students into moments of uncertainty comparable to the ambiguous situations they will face outside class, when historical judgment may be all that separates the discerning from the deceived. Additionally, putting students on the spot creates "atmospheres of risk-taking and foreboding, as well as occasions for exhilaration and excitement." In other words, it gets students engaged. "To be honest," a student wrote on her evaluation, "I was kind of scared shitless because I wasn't sure I could meet the demand of changing my thinking like you were asking." The performance element in signature pedagogies, Shulman is tempted to conclude, produces the pain that is necessary for gains in intellectual formation.²⁸ Of course, what teachers will want to aim for is the sweet spot between paralyzing students with fear and lulling them to sleep. Bruce Kochis of the University of Washington, Bothell, first showed me what this spot looks like when I was a young assistant professor full of illusions of competence about my teaching. Kochis summed up the crucial matter of student performances with questions I still ask myself on the way to class: Am I a professor? Then what will I say today? But if I am a teacher, what will they *do* today?

No course is ever finished or fully realizes the intentions of its designer. Twelve years ago, I took a deep breath, checked to see that no one was looking, and yanked my survey free from the "proper and customary way." Students freaked. Their teacher floundered. But eventually my intentions were rescued by the scholarship of teaching and learning. The work done by teachers and scholars in that field has made it possible to ground the design of my survey in knowledge more solid than handed-down folk wisdom or my own intuitions.

By presenting my survey as an example of uncoverage, I am not proposing that my course be the signature pedagogy every survey teacher should adopt. Is it really possible (or desirable) for history professors to adopt a distinctive pedagogy for the survey on the order of the case-dialogue method in law or clinical rounds in medicine? The question deserves consideration. Perhaps we will decide to call the analysis of historical texts history's signature pedagogy and leave it at that. I hope that we will be more ambitious. Let us at least talk more publicly and more deliberately about what we are doing in our courses.²⁹ Those who stay isolated in their classrooms will continue to say and believe the darnedest things. Exploring together the potential of uncoverage, a community of scholarly teachers may find ways to impress the signature of history on the history survey.

²⁸ Shulman, "Signature Pedagogies in the Professions," 57.

²⁹ For other models for public description and reflection on one's survey, see Patrick Allitt, *I'm the Teacher, You're the Student: A Semester in the University Classroom* (Philadelphia, 2005); Peter J. Frederick, "Four Reflections on Teaching and Learning History," *AHA Perspectives*, 39 (Oct. 2001); Tom Holt, *Thinking Historically: Narrative, Imagination, and Understanding* (New York, 1995).