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In late 1994, the National Center for History in the Schools (NCHS) published its *National Standards for History.* It quickly attracted an unexpectedly voracious amount of criticism, from an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* (later reprinted in *Reader's Digest*) by then-chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Lynn Cheney to radio attacks by Rush Limbaugh. Over the next eighteen months, the controversy continued in both editorial pages and formal radio debates.

This book is both an argument and an artifact. Authored by one secondary school history teacher (Crabtree) and two academic historians (Dunn and Nash), all of whom were involved in the production of the *Standards*, it is intended to refute some of Cheney's and others' well-publicized critiques.[1] Specifically, the book defends the ideological neutrality and the heuristic value of the *Standards*. To support this argument to lay readers, especially the American people, particularly "parents and grandparents of youngsters in the schools," the book introduces in considerable detail the impact of social history since the 1960s (xi).

The book is also an artifact of the 1990s 'culture wars,' laying out the details of this particular battle. The *Standards* are a product of the NCHS, which was founded in 1988, funded by the NEH. (The NCHS now supports itself on proceeds from its publications, including the *Standards*.) The impetus behind the *Standards* was fear in the early 1990s among a range of politicians, educators and others that American academic performance was insufficient in by international marketplace. By late 1991, the Bush administration had sponsored the NCHS to develop guidelines for which schoolteachers nationwide could use both as teaching resources and as a benchmark for evaluating student knowledge.

The book's main arguments are that the attacks against the *Standards* are both misrepresentative and uninformed by social history. The *Standards* are intended as supplementary to existing texts. As Cheney often noted, they mentioned Harriet Tubman more than Ulysses S. Grant. However, the

[1] Cheney's view is available in her 1996 book, *Telling the Truth*.

authors argue reasonably that the presidents are well covered in existing textbooks.

More basically, the authors argue that the "new social history" that academic historians have developed over the last thirty years has not filtered into school textbooks. Aspects of this movement include a wider range of inclusivity and focus on processes in addition to facts. The underlying assumption is that more students will feel greater interest in history if these paths are taken (this argument would have benefited from the voices of actual school students, who are assumed to be bored with traditional ways of teaching history).

In a related point, the book shows how academic historians lost interest in school history in the 1930s, a trend that this book hopes to reverse. In addition, it argues that American history, as remembered and taught, has always been contested. In contrast to the *Standard*'s critics' imagining of a unified American past, the book shows that nasty, partisan 'history wars' began soon after Yorktown and have occurred repeatedly. While professional historians are probably familiar with the broad outlines of these movements, they may be novel to lay readers.

For the readers of this journal, the book's greatest value may come from the warnings it provides to practicing and aspiring history teachers. Controversy may be the sign of a healthy democracy, and is certainly educational in itself, but can be unpleasant for those involved. Hopefully the years since the *Standards* debate represent a downward swing in the politicization of history, but as historians, we know there is little reason to believe the trend will be permanent. The book is also useful for schoolteachers in its discussion of the attempt to set national standards for education, which have until this time been controlled by local and state boards.

It is unclear the degree to which this book will change readers' minds, especially that of the mature lay public. The authors and their critics are competing for the position of spokesperson for the *pluribus*, insisting that their opponents are trying to dictate a narrow, exclusive version of U.S. history. One critique of the book is its uncritical use of the term "Americans" in association with specific attitudes or characteristics. As the work shows well, such unity has been and is rare. Nash, Crabtree, and Dunn make a convincing case for the importance of widening the traditional scope of the field, that national unity depends on more people feeling part of the *unum*.

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