

# History and its Future: The Essentials

Sarah Wolfe Escamilla

## Introduction

Of core disciplines being taught history is considered the most irrelevant. Our mission will be to change attitudes and the way history is delivered in areas of curriculum, state mandates, and importantly globally. According to Federico J. Rodriguez, “Over the last decade, the public education system has undergone unprecedented change.” He continues by saying, “The standards-based reform movement has transformed the focus and goals of public education. (Rodriguez, 2001)” From the NCLB to Obama’s proposed modification, we see strides in areas of student achievement levels. According to the website, [www.cep.org](http://www.cep.org) an article titled *Lessons from the Classrooms Level 1* state, “that though NCLB aims to close achievement gaps for students of different races, ethnicities, and income levels as well as students with disabilities it has shown some adequate progress.” Even though many schools have increased instructional time for English/Language Arts and mathematics, the article stresses that these moves have been made, at times, at the expense of other subjects (2010).

## Other Subjects

In today’s society, history has almost become an endangered species. Squished and stuffed under the umbrella of *social studies*, once thought of as a core discipline throughout public schools has become somewhat of thorn in the sides of administrators, instructors, and those in the political arena.

Government mandates have made school leaders and administrators run amuck. History has lost its definition and according to some is a discipline that is *dated*. As a result history classes have been shuffled, scattered and squeezed into class time by either the good intentions of an instructor understanding the need of history being taught to those who if not asked to teach it will completely avoid it. Unfortunately either scenario is not productive and fails to wholly include a discipline that needs a defined and structured time while appropriately being taught by educated instructors.

### **Leaders**

As leaders and administrators in the field of education, assertiveness is of the utmost importance when being bombarded by government and state mandates. This presentation is not to argue whether or not government and state mandates are positive or negative. The presentation of the *Essentials* is to make our leaders aware of the crisis looming over teaching history and its future. Author James W. Loewen informs readers, “we have not even begun to relate the data of how students perceive History, simply stated they hate it (James W. Loewen, 2007).”

### **Students**

Loewen’s introduction, titled, *Something Has Gone Very Wrong*, gives the reader insight to high school students’ views regarding the discipline. Sadly, he relates the students find the subject boring and in some instances, insulted by the manner in which history is portrayed. Some of the arguments are based off poorly written text books, that miss inform the students by white washing facts. Text books are criticized by being over elaborate in looks but content is far from par. Loewen makes note of key specifics he states, “Authors almost never use the

present to illuminate the past...the present is not a source of information for writers in history textbooks.” (2007) as leaders we should be yelling from the top of our lungs, WE OBJECT! Yet, we merely turn and walk away contemplating how to appease governmental mandates. Leaders step lightly and look what is occurring globally. In 2008, London, reported in an article titled *Drop Middle-Class Academic Subjects Says Schools Advisor* whose main theme is trying to implement programs where students, “no longer study history, geography and science but learn skills such as energy-saving and civic responsibility through projects and themes (Laura Clark, 2008). Clark’s main argument is that Tories, may I note her reference to history, attempted to impose *middle –class* values and views suggesting that English, math’s, histories, science and a second language actually *alienated* many students, especially those from disadvantage backgrounds (2008).

I will agree and boldly say that history text books are insulting to those who have a brain especially students with different ethnicities. Loewen continually addresses this in his book by citing a stunning example, he states that, “Spanish are seen as intruders and the British are seen as settlers (2007).” Text books are plagued by this type of thought, nationalism or Europeanism. So in a sense textbooks are imposing inadequate data that is not relevant to our society and districts. Sadly funding for these books is quite expensive. We are not receiving the quality of resource needed for our students.

However, anti-subject ideology as stated in Clark’s article is “deeply damaging to our education system (2008).” Extremist now seem to have a valid argument and we are in grave danger of losing this discipline. So as leaders we need to have a sound perspective of how history should be dealt with in the classrooms that projects how students will view the future.

## Globalization

How can history contribute to globalization in a modern world? History no longer focuses on dead aristocrats or the memorization of dates; it is an in-depth look at how the past has brought us to where we are today. As leaders we need to implement curriculums that support the diverseness of this discipline. Peter N. Stearns author of *Why Study History?* Informs readers of the importance of studying history (2008) that are literally essential in today's global society. Stearns offers modern views for distinguished disciplines such as the ability to understand the operations of people and societies. A prime example is the ability to understand how the impact of technology innovation has influenced society. Stearns cites that history can offer a diverse thought on political science by researching the cause and effect of past and current events. For instance, he states, "Any time we try to know why something happened whether it is a shift in political party dominance in the American Congress or a major change in teen age suicide rates, or to a war in the middle east (Peter N. Stearns, 2008). Stearns even approaches the subject of *Moral Understanding*. Stearns informs readers, "People who weathered adversity who successfully worked through moral dilemmas, but also of more ordinary people who provide lessons in courage, diligence or constructive protest (Peter N. Stearns, 2008). Lastly, Stearns points out the important skills learned by studying history; the ability to assess evidence, by a capacity to distinguish between objective and self-serving motives. The ability to assess conflicting interpretations, and Experience in assessing past examples of change (Peter N. Stearns, 2008). Stearns ideas of innovative thinking are essential in today's globalized society.

## **Publishers**

As leaders and administrators we have the abilities to adopt or modify programs, we can even take a pro-active stance with government mandates. Educated leaders have the abilities to step up to the podium and request funding, newer technology, and even lead the team of representatives who is in charge of working with textbook publishers. As leaders and consumers in the textbook industry we have a voice. Express your concerns and visions to publishing reps; as the buyer what is relevant to the continued growth in history in today's culture?

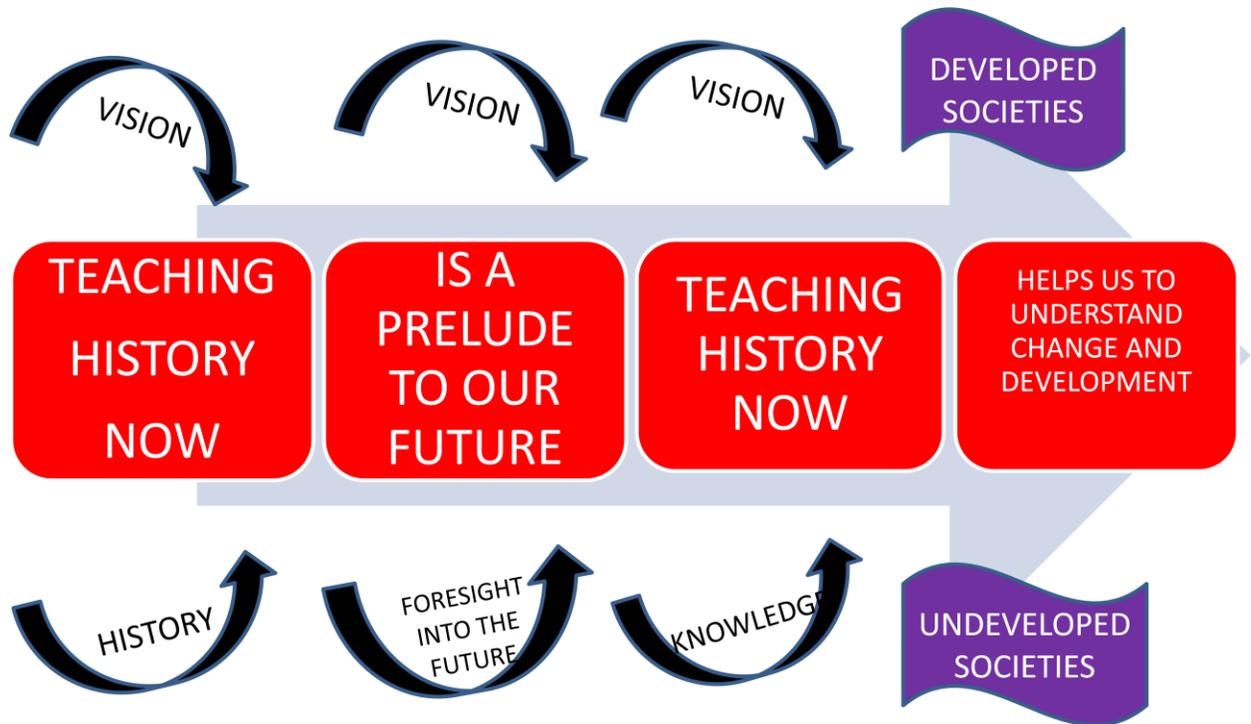
Publishers seem to have a perspective of this challenge yet they are not sure what constitutes adequate and resourceful information for today's challenging global society. They too seem to be at odds of what needs to be included. According to Gilbert Sewall, director of the American Textbook Council in New York sites "you can't put something in without taking something out. (Jost, Kenneth, 1995)" Evidently publishers are at odds at what needs to be added and amended. Loewen critically asserts that publishers find that the present is not a source of information for writers of history books (2008) meaning, that textbook authors do not find it relevant to pull history into the present and even the future.

## **Conclusion**

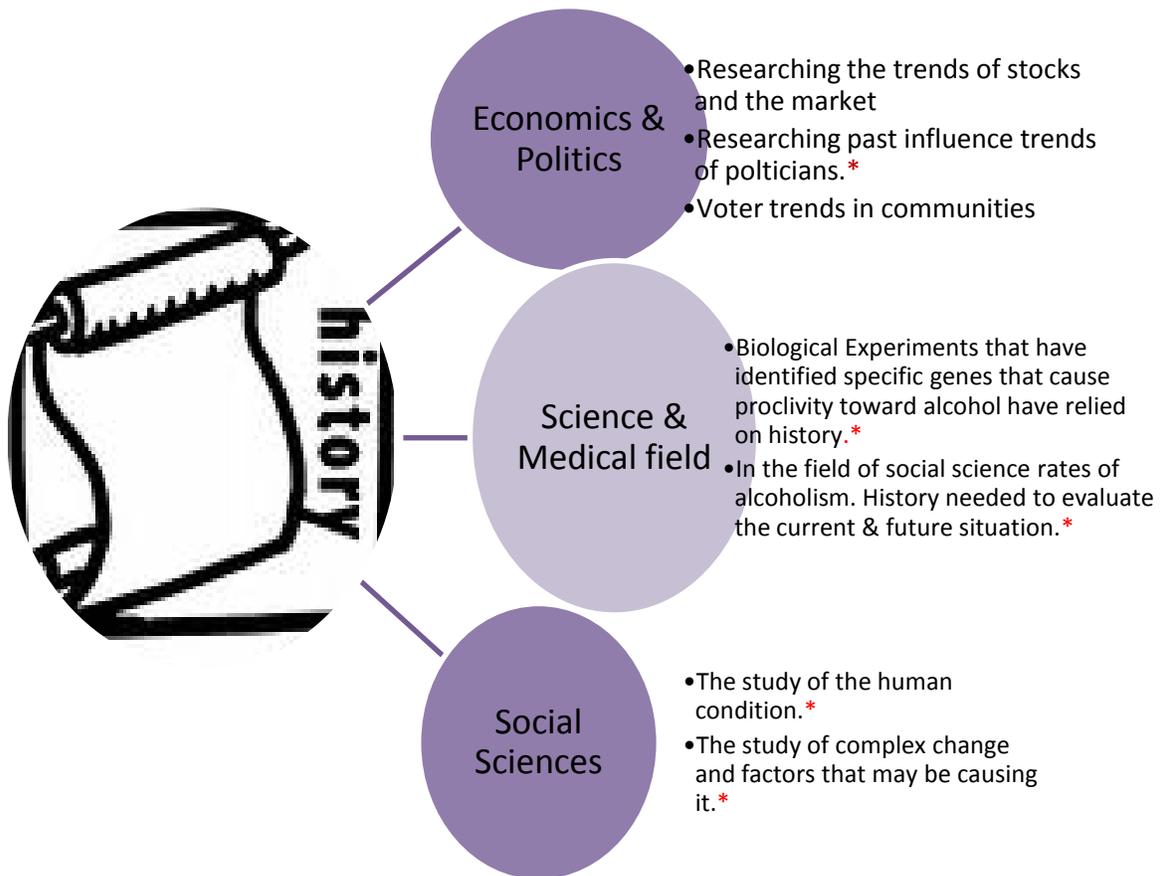
Tension between what is relevant to instruction and how to develop historical habits of mind is a continual battle for administrators, instructors, text publishers, and policy makers. We run a risk of losing this core discipline if it is not modified to meet the needs of our current society.

In a global society where time is of the essence, the study of history is Essential whether it is ancient or recent. As educators and leaders we need to counter attack the dreaded adage that has plagued history disciplines. Challenge educational policies! Take a pro-active approach with government mandates while adapting innovative methods of curriculum and instruction while initiating *essential* modern venues for this core discipline.

APPENDIX A



## APPENDIX B



## Reference

- Clark, L. (2008). *Drop 'Middle-Class' Academic Subjects says School Adviser*. Daily Mail [London]. Retrieved April 19, 2010, from the <https://catalog2.nmsu.edu:2055/us/Inacademic/delivery/PrintDoc.do?job>
- Jost, K. (1995). *Teaching History, What Should High School Students Learn?* Retrieved April 22, 2010, from CQ Researcher database.
- Jost, K. (2010). *Revising No Child Left Behind, Can Obama's blueprint fix Bush's Education Policies?* Retrieved April 19, 2010, from the CQ Researcher database.
- Loewen, J. W. (2007). *Lies My Teacher told Me, Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Rodriguez, F. J. (2001). *Futuristic Leadership in a Global Community*. Scholar and Educator.
- Stearns, P. N. (2008). *Why Study History?* American Historical Association. Retrieved April 19, 2010, from the <http://www.historians.org/pubs/free/WhyStudyHistory.htm>
- Yilmaz, K. (2009). *A Vision of History Teaching and Learning: Thoughts on History Education in Secondary Schools*. The High School Journal. Retrieved from the <https://catalog.2.nmsu.edu>