

PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS' DEPARTMENT

Edited by OLIVER S. HECKMAN

Adviser, Secondary Education, Department of Public Instruction, Harrisburg

THE IMPORTANCE OF STATE AND NATIONAL HISTORY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

By LILY LEE NIXON

Peabody High School, Pittsburgh

WE HAVE in our country hundreds of teachers colleges, schools of education, and colleges of liberal arts in which thousands of professors with the help of the latest methods try every year to improve the equipment of the teachers they produce. Yet the old description of the basic learning process is still fundamentally true: Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and a student on the other.

Besides the proverbial log (in whatever form it takes) it may be said that there are only five requisites to education. Of these the student must have two and the teacher two, and the fifth is essential to both.

The first thing the student needs is ability to learn. Many educators regard it rather foolish if not actually dangerous to allow anyone to take work beyond his ability. "It is not so much that literature confuses," says Jonathan Daniels in a recent book, "as that the easily confused can read." But even a moron can develop love of country and obedience to its laws through knowledge of the courage, dependability, and other admirable traits of our country's heroes.

The second requirement for the student is a desire to learn. This desire may be stimulated by many contacts made outside the school and often by much that the teacher can do and say. Too often, however, boys and girls are as unresponsive to "book larnin" as a dead electric-light bulb is to the current. The logical solution for this type of pupil seems to be vocational-school training during the formative years followed by industrial employment. Night-school and correspondence courses are available to those to whom later comes a desire to study.

We now come to the teacher's two requisites. As there is no royal road to learning, neither is there a king's highway in teaching. The first and most important thing for the history teacher to have is a thorough knowledge of the history of the United States and, for us in this state, of the keystone position held by Pennsylvania. Some of us have never had an opportunity to teach a course in Pennsylvania history, but one cannot teach world history, much less United States history, without imparting recognition of many important events which happened in this state. We need to take extension courses and summer courses, read biographies written by historians rather than by journalists, travel widely, see historical plays and moving pictures, and know and own many of the works of the best historians of yesterday and of today. In order that knowledge acquired in these various ways will not slip away, card indexes may be kept which can be easily and often reviewed. One card will hold the gist of a new biography, another of a particularly witty or illuminating story of Benjamin Franklin or of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Every trip can supply material for one or more cards. A file of illustrative pictures helps the teacher as well as the pupil, and the necessity for knowing well maps and globe cannot be overemphasized.

Although the history teacher cannot teach effectively unless he is filled and fired with his subject, he must realize his own limitations in dealing with the vast expanse of history. He must often confess that he does not know this and is not sure of that. He must, however, have such a fund of information and so much ability to analyze cause and effect that the students will accept this admission without losing faith in him.

The second requirement for the teacher, usually growing out of the first, is the ability to transfer both his information and his enthusiasm to his students. To this end he may use any method, all methods, the eclectic method. One teacher may employ a certain device especially well, while another may get best results from an entirely different approach. There may be variation from class to class and from day to day in the effectiveness of any means of instruction. A device that works well in one class may have to be abandoned in another. Any method is the best that gives the maximum return in historical information, love of country, respect for law and order, toleration, and determination to keep and extend the democratic way of life. Indeed, for the

average teacher more time spent in acquiring content and less in learning the latest fads in methods would benefit the students.

When the intelligent student refuses to study the history and the basic functions of government which every citizen should know, compulsion of some sort should be used. But if the public-school system had definite standards and the courage to hold to them, all but a negligible percentage of those capable would voluntarily do their work. A student should not be blamed, however, for his failure to retain historic information unless he has been given sufficient review. In other fields, such as reading, mathematics, music, languages, and chemistry, knowledge gained is constantly used so that there is a sort of cumulative build-up. This is seldom the case in the study of history. Some material may never again be found in the same pattern as that in which it is first presented; yet it may have great importance because of its tremendous effect on the course of human events. One suggestion for carrying on the necessary review is to have a chairman in each class appoint daily a student to bring in on the following day ten factual questions on any material previously taught.

When two semesters are devoted to studying United States history, motion pictures and dramatization can be used, and one day a week can be spared for invaluable library work. Broad topics collateral with the text work may be selected and several students assigned to work on each subject, consulting any biography, historical work of reference, or history text not used in class. The preparation of short written summaries with bibliographical data and detailed oral reports is good preparation for college work. The library work involved broadens the students' viewpoint and expands their powers of interpretation, often to the point of positive disagreement from the ideas of the textbook author or of the teacher.

One excellent vehicle in extending and deepening the historical knowledge and patriotism of the keen student is the history club or junior-historical society. While the club which the writer sponsors does not restrict its study to the history of Pennsylvania, among the wide-ranging subjects discussed are the battles of Loyal Hanna and Bushy Run, Albert Gallatin, Allegheny County in the Civil War, and Pittsburgh in the War of 1812. Additional interest is developed through such activities as field trips, a visit to the museum of the Historical Society of Western

Pennsylvania, and a picnic held at the close of the school term on a spot which has historical significance.

Four requirements for the making of an informed student of history have now been noted—the ability and the desire to learn on the part of the student and knowledge of the subject and ability to impart it on the part of the teacher. The fifth, for both student and teacher, is the most important of all, for without it the others are almost useless. It is time—time in which to teach, time in which to learn.

On June 21, 1942, the *New York Times* called attention on its front page (with statistics covering much of another page) to the fact that the study of history is not required in eighty-two per cent of American colleges. The value of this startling survey cannot be measured. The devolution of the study of history has not been confined to colleges; many high-school courses have been shortened. On March 31 the writer fulminated in a panel discussion about the travesty of teaching all of American history in high school in one semester. We need three semesters rather than one for teaching the history of the United States. The *New York Times* for August 9, 1942, carries the opinion of a noted educator who predicts that secondary schools throughout the country will offer two years of study of history and problems of democracy. Why the time was ever reduced is not apparent. It is little wonder that many citizens do not even vote. Less than fifty per cent have ever had a course in American history; a large number have no realization of the blood, sweat, and tears which our forefathers gave that we might have our way of life. Walter Lippmann thinks the reason England has been able to carry on under the terrific bombings is that her people know their history. They know the long struggle and the final triumph of the barons with King John, of Parliament with the Stuart kings, of the people against enemy countries.

Great Britain is now teaching American history as a separate course. In some American schools even world history is not compulsory. Yet among many thinkers the consensus is that a world government is bound to come. In this hurried moment every soldier in the United States Army is being taught much of the country's recent connection with world affairs, and military and naval officers are given lectures on the customs, government, and conditions of the Axis lands. High schools should assist

in this enlightenment by offering required courses in world history. If nationalism does prevail, changed conditions will make it necessary for us to have allies and to know more of Latin America and of the Near and the Far East than we now do.

We have tried short cuts to knowledge. "For the past twenty-five years," says James B. Reston in *Prelude to Victory*, "we have been concentrating not only on labor-saving devices but also on thought-saving devices; we have been mass-producing not only our machines but our minds. In this time between the wars we have concentrated on getting more and more for less and less; we have taken our history from 'outlines,' our news from abbreviated 'round-ups' and even our books and magazines from digests."¹ The roots of the present lie deep in the past. Those who do not know the past cannot understand the present. We almost ignore the time, more than a century and a half, when we were British colonists. We try to teach American history down to 1763 in five days—and those the first confused week of the semester! That is not sufficient time to teach the implications of the Maryland Toleration Act, the Zenger Case, and the Fall of Fort Duquesne—just three of the many events which condition our lives today. We get little sense of process, little sense of the slowness and magnitude of time. We have disparaged memory work and acquisition of facts; we wanted only attitudes and ability to think. But these results presuppose certain antecedents. Not only have we put the cart before the horse; the horse itself is almost completely neglected.

The superficiality of the knowledge thus gained will perhaps account for some of the lamentable mistakes of the present time. Many of our leaders, while they may have rated high in simple objective tests, may not have had opportunities to think things through from the various causes to the ramifying effects in good old essay-type examinations. Students need meat, and, because it takes time to masticate meat, we give them milk toast.

Some educators will protest, "But we are teaching citizenship in our social-studies classes, and citizenship is the vital thing." Of course it is, but it is the firm belief of many that we cannot best teach our type of citizenship as a separate objective. Surely there is no better way of teaching citizenship than by comparing

¹James B. Reston, *Prelude to Victory*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1942.

in their proper matrices the citizenship of Benedict Arnold to that of George Washington, that of James Wilkinson to that of Thomas Jefferson. Tolerance, which is the essence of the American type of citizenship and which is in great danger of neglect in time of war, can be stressed while studying the period of Aaron Burr, a man who was greatly suspected but against whom treason could not be proved; and above all in the life of Abraham Lincoln, who could say in deed as well as in word, "With malice toward none, with charity for all." In history we have concrete examples of all the vices and all the virtues of mankind. May the present generation have time to learn, to teach, and above all to profit by the history of the United States of America.

THE NEW YORK TIMES REPORT ON THE TEACHING OF AMERICAN HISTORY; REFLECTIONS AND REACTIONS

From the Pennsylvania Public-School Point of View

BY OLIVER S. HECKMAN

Department of Public Instruction, Harrisburg

THE main thought presented by Professor Allen Nevins in his New York *Times* article of May 3, 1942, is that the young people of our country are very poorly informed on the fundamentals of American history when they leave high school or even college. This condition, it is maintained, presents a serious danger to our national existence, for "no nation can be patriotic in the best sense, no people can feel a proud citizenship, without a knowledge of the past." "Our press is full of references to the devotion and heroism shown in former crises," states Professor Nevins, who by implication at least doubts that such noble qualities will be exemplified by American youth in the present conflict. Specifically, there are missing a knowledge of the contributions of leading persons to the building of the American nation, a clear appreciation of the chronological sequence of events and their causes, and a correct interpretation of significant episodes in our national life. Young people "know something about Alexander Hamilton, but are not quite sure about Albert Gallatin; they have heard of Harriet Beecher Stowe, but not of Hinton R. Helper; they can identify Horace Greeley, but not Edwin L. Godkin. They frequently lack any clear perception of chronology;

they are uncertain whether Polk came before Pierce, Irving before Herman Melville, or McCormick before Alexander Graham Bell. Their understanding of causality is limited. They know something about the Stamp Act, but not the Molasses Act in the events preceding the Revolution; something about the Dred Scott decision, but nothing of the tariff of 1857 in the events preceding the Civil War. On some matters they are grossly misinformed. They will assert vehemently that British propaganda and the munitions-makers thrust us into the war in 1917."

Professor Nevins believes this condition to be due mainly to the absence of state laws requiring that pupils take courses in American history. "Our educational requirements in American History and government have been, and are," he says, "deplorably haphazard, chaotic, and ineffective . . . the most wide-spread requirement is that school pupils must be instructed in the American Constitution, but eight states do not ask even that, while others interpret the rule in the loosest fashion." Taking the country as a whole, "probably the majority of American children never receive the equivalent of a full year's careful work in our national history. The high school trusts to the grade school, often with quite misplaced confidence. The college assumes that the lower schools have taught the essential American history when they may merely have asked pupils to read the Constitution, or may have given a few days to building model wigwams and log cabins in a 'coördinated' program; or may have offered a hasty dab at America in a survey of World history."

This indictment of elementary and secondary schools is devastating and alarming. If it is true, immediate and effective steps should be taken to correct the condition. In nearly seven years of supervising schools in Pennsylvania I have yet to find one in which pupils in American history were engaged in constructing log cabins or wigwams. Activities of this kind are undertaken to a limited extent in the primary grades and in kindergartens as a means of increasing the reality of certain phases of history. The textbooks in American history used in Pennsylvania public schools have never been better than they are now. In general they contain a balanced treatment of political, military, economic, and social history and are excellently illustrated with pictures, charts, and maps. Suggested questions, classroom activities, and supplementary references are to be found in all of them. Their style

and diction are usually within the ability of pupils in the grades for which the texts are designed, but the concepts of living intended to be mastered from texts used in the elementary grades are in many instances too remote from the experiences of the pupils to be very effective. Textbooks for senior high schools, which vary in length from eight hundred to eleven hundred pages, are written by such eminent historians as Charles A. Beard, Eugene C. Barker, James T. Adams, Harold U. Faulkner, Marcus Jernegan, and Fremont Wirth.

A library worthy of the name has been developed in every high school in the state, according to the secondary-school classification reports submitted to the Department of Public Instruction by principals and superintendents. As one might expect, the libraries vary considerably in quality and quantity of reference materials to be found in them. Indeed, some of the better libraries include such admirable series as the American Nation, Chronicles of America, Pageant of America, and Riverside as well as several standard single-volume references on leading characters, government, economics, sociology, literature, religion, art, and other phases of national history. At least three-fourths of the high schools in Pennsylvania possess projectors for either slides or moving pictures and sometimes both. The extent to which these resources are used is indicated by the fact that a rapidly growing number of schools are joining film libraries or are renting films from commercial organizations. Maps, globes, charts, pamphlets, current periodicals, and similar types of instructional aids are found in practically every public school.

Methods of instruction in history have changed somewhat over the past twenty years. The expansion of resources available to teachers and pupils has led to an increase in oral and written reports based on the study of materials outside the text. Scrapbooks are made which include pictures and clippings relating to significant episodes in our history. Panel discussions, dramatic presentations, field trips, and other teaching techniques are quite commonly used. There is more free and open classroom discussion, with correspondingly less question-and-answer instruction than in former years. The use of visual aids has helped many pupils who do not readily comprehend abstract ideas to understand the meaning of early American life.

The legal status of the schools with respect to United States history is clear. Section 1607 of the school laws of Pennsylvania provides that "in every elementary public and private school, established and maintained in this Commonwealth, the following subjects shall be taught . . . the History of the United States and of Pennsylvania, civics, including loyalty to the State and National Government." Section 3903 requires further that "in all public and private schools located within the Commonwealth . . . there shall be given regular courses of instruction in the Constitution of the United States. Such instruction shall begin not later than the opening of the eighth grade and shall continue in the high school course."

Schools throughout the state comply with the letter and the spirit of the law. Naturally there is no uniformity as to content, plan of presentation, and distribution. Certain variations are to be expected and may be regarded as desirable in view of differences in the needs of pupils and lack of agreement among textbook writers and teachers as to essentials.

A large majority of the schools have organized their social-studies programs on the plan outlined in the following Department of Public Instruction bulletins:

Bulletin 413—Course of Study in Social Studies for Grades I and II.

Social relationships in the immediate community with references to certain phases of its history.

Bulletin 414—Course of Study in Social Studies for Grades III and IV.

Grade III—Primitive Civilizations.

Grade IV—Medieval and Early Modern European History to the close of the period of discovery and exploration.

Bulletin 415—Course of Study in Social Studies for Grades V and VI.

Grade V—American History from the period of discovery and exploration to the launching of the nation under the Constitution.

Grade VI—From the launching of the nation under the Constitution to the present time.

Bulletin 416—Course of Study in Social Studies for Grades VII and VIII.

Grade VII—A history of civilization from prehistoric times to the present time.

Grade VIII—American history from about 1500 to the present time.

Bulletin 417—Course of Study in Social Studies for Grade IX.

Grade IX—Political, social and economic institutions common to the State and nation.

The Department of Public Instruction does not have available social-studies bulletins for Grade X, World History; Grade XI, American History; and Grade XII, Problems of Democracy. According to this program somewhat more than a third of the school time allocated to the social studies is devoted to United States history, and the pupil covers at three different times substantially the same ground. In addition there is much United States history in the civics course in the ninth grade and in the problems-of-democracy course in the twelfth.

The content of United States history has undergone considerable change during the past thirty years both in scope and in interpretation. From an approach which was almost entirely political and military we have moved to one in which the broader aspects of the social and economic life of the people is studied. A knowledge of the contribution of the country to progress in architecture, science, health, agriculture, education, fine arts, religion, and technology is now considered as significant to intelligent citizenship as a detailed understanding of the wars in which the nation has participated.

The impact of the present war will very likely expedite certain trends which have for several years been evident to scholars in this field. For example, we have gradually been shifting emphasis from a strictly national to an international viewpoint. The rapid expansion of aerial transportation, of human interests, and of economic needs makes it imperative for those who are to guide the future destiny of the land to comprehend the interdependence of peoples and nations. Their knowledge must be based on more than a superficial study of the present scene or a narrow interpretation of United States history; it must be founded on understanding of the ideals on which the American way of life has developed.

In Department Bulletin 410, "A Tentative Chart Showing the Scope and Sequence of a Social Studies Program," are outlined the following phases of life: Coöperating in Social and Civic Action, Adjusting to and Improving the Material Environment, Earning a Living, Protecting and Improving Life and Health, Engaging in Recreation, Securing an Education, Making a Home, Expressing Spiritual and Emotional Impulses, and Expressing Esthetic Impulses. This bulletin, published in 1938 by the Department of Public Instruction, was soon followed by two complementary bulletins—number 418, "School Living for Social Purposes," and number 411, "Suggestions for Developing a Social Studies Program in the Secondary School." In these aids the department recognized a growing tendency in many sections of the country toward the integration of history, economics, sociology, and psychology. The plan has been adopted to a limited extent by elementary schools and to a lesser degree by secondary schools. The United States Commissioner of Education, according to an article published in the *New York Times* for July 12, 1942, gave approval to this type of program when he stated that all students should take integrated social-studies courses, but that the latter should not be so diluted as to afford only a glimpse of the historical foundations of the country. The field of social studies—either history and civics or an integrated course, according to the judgment of local school administrators and teachers—is included in the program outlined by the state for the first nine grades of the public-school system. In the senior high school (that is, the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades) social studies, English, and health and physical education are the only required subjects. All others are elective. A minimum of two years of social studies is necessary for graduation. This state requirement may be extended at the discretion of school directors.

The latest pronouncement by the Department of Public Instruction on American history was made on August 24, 1942, in a bulletin entitled "The Pennsylvania Wartime Education Program, Part I. Reports of the Wartime Education Committees Appointed by the Superintendent of Public Instruction Following a Conference of Educational Institutions and School Officials." The following extracts from this publication are illustrative of suggested points of emphasis:

The local community and the state of Pennsylvania including an understanding of community and regional conditions and problems [should] be used as the starting point in instruction in the social studies and geography.

Relationship between the United States and the rest of the world in connection with:

- (1) The ideals and aims of the explorers and settlers as they show conditions in their homelands.
- (2) The process by which Europeans adapted themselves to new conditions and became Americans. Current efforts to assimilate refugees; to break down prejudice against those of other racial and religious groups.
- (3) The American Revolution as part of a world struggle.
- (4) The relation of the United States as a World Power to other parts of the world.
- (5) Interdependence as affected by technology in a rapidly shrinking world.

Social understanding and attitudes developed through emphasis upon:

- (1) The manner of life, homes, and customs of people and the way in which they solved their problems with emphasis upon the history and development of the local region and the State of Pennsylvania.
- (2) Showing how democratic forms developed through the need for law and order and protection of individual rights in colonial times and on the frontier.
- (3) Such attitudes as tolerance illustrated in the life of Roger Williams or in the world of Penn in England and Pennsylvania.
- (4) An understanding of the origin of our liberties, of the hardships endured by men as they struggle for freedom, through use of radio scripts, transcriptions, etc., as Americans All, Immigrants All, Let Freedom Ring, etc.
- (5) The formation of one nation after the Revolution by the bringing together of diverse elements through the need for freedom, protection, co-operation and compromise.
- (6) The effect of such inventions as the airplane upon the life of the people and upon our war effort.

Activities and subject matter selected so as to develop understanding of:

- (2) Modern struggle for democracy in North and South America, in European nations, China and India.
- (3) Documents symbolizing and guaranteeing freedom—the Magna Charta, Mayflower Compact, Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and Bill of Rights, Pact of Paris, Atlantic Charter, the Four Freedoms, etc.
- (9) Adjustment of government—local, state and national to wartime needs.
- (12) The present war as but one part of mankind's long struggle for freedom.

On October 2 at the request of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction the Wartime Committee on Social Studies met in Harrisburg to plot further steps to be taken. Its recommendations are now under advisement by Superintendent Haas.

Many individuals, groups, and organized bodies have special concerns which they want promoted through the schools. Occasionally representatives of such interests try to give their immediate desires predominance over everything else in the school program. For instance, the head of a large organization of science and mathematics teachers recently recommended that social-studies requirements in the high schools be eliminated and that all pupils be given advanced courses in mathematics and science in order to become better fitted for participation in the war effort. A department of public instruction should be aware of changing demands placed upon youth and should direct modifications of the educational program accordingly. Special interests of both lay and professional groups are carefully studied from every angle before any action is taken. Since the school exists for the purpose of desirable growth and education, the several subject fields and the school activities must be apportioned in the school program according to the relative contribution of each.

A study of high-school records and principals' statements reveals that every pupil graduated from a public high school has had at least one year of American history during his last three years in school and that a large majority of them have had in addition one year each of world history and problems of democracy. The degree

to which pupils obtain an understanding of the essential facts of history, an appreciation for the American way of life, and a desire to live and participate in constructive social endeavors depends upon the child, the school, and the community. Pennsylvania does not need more legislation on the teaching of American history. What she does need is more teachers who will make the lessons of American history a constructive force in the lives of young people.