DEALING WITH DIFFERENCE IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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This article will address the question of how difference has been dealt with by the social studies curriculum since its formal inauguration as part of American schooling in the early twentieth century. Over the last hundred years, cultural and ideological differences have played a large role in defining how Americans interpret citizenship education, the hallmark of social studies, and in informing notions of what is educationally worthwhile as related to citizenship. Ideological difference has, of course, been a recurring theme in textbook censorship battles and curriculum disputes over the course of this history.

Social studies emerged during the period 1890-1920, in which nativist and racist reactions to the challenges of emancipated slaves, alien newcomers, and unsettled gender relations were all deeply implicated in refashioning the educational enterprise. This article explains how the social studies curriculum has responded to the press of cultural, racial, and gender differences since the birth of the field. It is also an invitation to other researchers to test the hypotheses offered here in future considerations of this subject.

In examining the history of the social studies, Michael Lybarger suggested that we ask: “What counted as social studies knowledge? Whose knowledge was this? What forms of social action did this knowledge legitimate, and what forms did it proscribe?” These questions suggest several things: the normative nature, social legitimation, situatedness, and various consequences of curriculum. Indeed, Jeffrey Mirel has called schools “a major battleground in the struggle to define national identity and good citizenship.” To the extent that this statement accurately describes relationships among schooling, social studies, and cultural ethos, this investigation of how social studies has dealt with difference provides a barometer of our shifting views on American national identity. Before embarking on the discussion of this history, however, a few definitions, caveats, and comments on methodology are in order.

In considering curriculum, Arthur Applebee’s definition provides a useful framework for this endeavor. Applebee views curriculum as “conversation” between teacher and learner as well as between past and present. In other words, curriculum is an educational tradition providing a set of “culturally constituted tools for understanding and reforming the world.” This view has several advantages for this analysis since it situates curriculum in cultural and historical context; highlights the role of curriculum agents, including teachers, textbooks writers, and academic specialists; views the process of curriculum creation as a set of transactions among these parties, as well as between teachers and learners; and aligns with a vision of schooling as a “critical mediating institution” between families and the twentieth century’s rapidly changing social order. As in previous works, I argue that considerations of positionality are pertinent to the analysis of curriculum history: who taught, who led, who learned, and who wrote authoritative works in the field constitute differences that can make a difference to the practice of social studies.

If we take seriously Applebee’s formulation of curriculum as a tradition of discourse that helps students make sense of their world, the questions of whether and, if so, how social studies deals with difference, who gets included in curriculum and on what terms, and who speaks authoritatively about subject matter, are all distinctions that make a difference to citizenship education and to the civic polity. Analyzing the history of dealing with difference in the social studies will illuminate how we have
conceptualized the fundamental epistemological and normative underpinnings lying at the heart of this school subject.\textsuperscript{10}

Three eras, defined loosely in terms of decades, will be discussed: 1910-1940, the cultural amelioration phase; 1941-1980, the psychological compensation phase; and 1981 to the present, the knowledge transformation phase. Among factors important in shaping approaches to difference are the social and political climate of historical periods, shifts in views concerning educational purposes and problems, and evolving understandings of the nature and aims of social studies. Each of these factors carries weight across all phases, but the prominence of the individual factor may differ according to time period.\textsuperscript{11} It is likewise important to acknowledge that use of the phrase “the field of social studies” should not be taken to imply a unified disciplinary set of agents or accepted practices in the United States.\textsuperscript{12}

In terms of historical method, traditional secondary sources within social studies historiography have been examined as well as other historical evidence drawn from individuals and organizations operating “outside” of “mainstream” social studies (i.e., materials associated with historically black colleges and universities and intercultural organizations that involve social studies but which have not been viewed as central to the field’s development in past historical accounts).\textsuperscript{13} Several domains of activity are attended to, including the following: publications by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) and by prominent curriculum theorists; textbooks written for use in social studies classrooms; and intellectual trends in the academic disciplines feeding the social studies. What gets left out are descriptions of the effects of social studies teachers’ roles as “curricular-instructional gatekeepers” in applying curriculum ideas related to difference to their classrooms.\textsuperscript{14} What also gets left out are educational reports by the federal government, an entity which has become more involved with schooling in recent years, but whose growing influence has been less prominent from a curricular standpoint.

The diverse nature of the evidence reflects a belief that change occurs as a result of multiple pressure points on curriculum, part of which gets exerted over time from the margins to the center. For example, new topics, such as gay and lesbian history, may eventually appear within the school curriculum, but they will probably do so only after a lag time of perhaps thirty years after legitimation by the academic disciplines. When new material appears in the curriculum, it often arrives in a sanitized fashion, reflecting the politics of school textbook adoption.\textsuperscript{15} Furthermore, even when educational theorists, curricula writers, and textbook authors legitimate new approaches, altered curriculum prescriptions rarely displace all vestiges of the older ways of treating a subject.\textsuperscript{16} Despite the slow pace of change, however, we should accord significance to the altered prescriptions for practice documented in this article. Bearing in mind the conservative nature of most educational professional organizations and their members, finding recommendations for change in print, if not practice, is noteworthy.

The Cultural Amelioration Phase: 1910-1940

The early twentieth century has often been described as a period of cultural assimilation or Americanization of “new” immigrants—groups from southern and eastern Europe, who were seen as posing greater challenges to incorporation into the body politic than the “old” immigrants from northern and western Europe.\textsuperscript{17} Calling this early period the “cultural amelioration phase” highlights the efforts of progressive educators to school new immigrants and change their old ways for their “own good.”\textsuperscript{18} Social studies education, in particular, was designed to remediate cultural deficiency and create better citizens out of those some intellectuals feared were not suitable raw material for democracy. Education would provide these groups with an entry point into a society viewed in the early twentieth century as representing the apex of the evolutionary ladder of cultures worldwide.\textsuperscript{19}

During this era, many scholars interpreted difference from white, Anglo-Saxon cultural norms in terms of deficiency and explained deficiency largely in terms of biological inheritance. Nevertheless, progressive educators also placed faith in the power of schooling to eradicate the most dramatic effects of such differences. In giving curriculum form to these aspirations, educational and philanthropic leaders turned to Thomas Jesse Jones, who held several degrees from Columbia University, including an M.A (1899), and a Ph.D. (1904) from Teachers College and Columbia University, and a bachelor’s of divinity
from Union Theological Seminary (1900). Jones’s doctoral dissertation in the new field of educational sociology addressed issues of adjustment within immigrant communities to life in New York City. He made his early professional mark at Hampton Institute in Virginia, in part by developing a course called “social studies,” which aimed at introducing the habits and virtues of citizenship to the African American and Native American students there. Jones believed education would bring these groups closer to what he later called the “essentials of civilization.” Jones interpreted racial (what we would call today “ethnic”) differences as stemming from physical, mental, and social factors. He believed that concentrated doses of moral and character education could provide antidotes to the “impulsiveness” and favoring of “belief and superstition over knowledge” found within these groups.

Jones chaired the Committee on Social Studies in 1912, the year in which he also became a specialist in Negro education at the United States Bureau of Education. In 1913, Jones was appointed Education Director of the Phelps-Stokes Fund, a philanthropic organization devoted to improving the situation of blacks in the United States and Africa. Included on the Committee in Social Studies were several other individuals educated by Franklin Giddings, a sociologist steeped in the perspective of Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner, both of whom had applied evolutionary ideas to social systems. Although Jones spoke of the backwardness of the black race, he also wrote about its great possibilities for improvement. Education in general and social studies in particular, with its promulgation of solid work habits, grounding in the principles of democratic government, devotion to community, and development of independent character, would provide the impetus for creating sound citizenship. The views promulgated by the Committee on Social Studies reflected those later enunciated in the 1918 Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education issued by the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education. The Cardinal Principles identified seven objectives for secondary education consonant with Jones’s platform: health, command of fundamental processes, worthy home membership, vocation, citizenship, worthy use of leisure, and ethical character.

Over the next thirty years, the popularity of Jones’s approach to the education of African Americans provoked negative reactions from black leaders such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Carter G. Woodson. Racial determinism, white paternalism, and industrial education all served as the hallmarks of educational programs gaining social and governmental sanction for blacks during this period. Nevertheless, many black leaders resisted such narrowly defined educational efforts, as did several spokespersons for European immigrant groups, arguing for the robust nature of their ethnic cultures rather than their cultural deficiencies or pathologies.

As early as 1915, various other alternative voices to dominant views concerning the means and ends of education for diverse groups could be heard. The most prominent of these was Horace Kallen, who challenged the notion of the melting pot as a useful model for American identity. Several female social educators of this period, such as Lucy Salmon, Jane Addams, Lucy Sprague Mitchell, and Mary Beard, took positions on cultural difference that were not nearly as rigidly hierarchical as the dominant view within social studies. These women were also generally more attuned to gender and its legitimate place in social education than were other social studies theorists of their day.

A few of these women, including Salmon and Addams, spurned marriage and lived with life-long partners in women’s colleges or social settlements. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has described the “female world of love and ritual” often found in such settings. These institutions provided a haven for certain women from the tumultuous gender relations of the day, a period during which the ideology of masculinity often stood in the way of truly companionate marriage. Several textbooks at that time included the accomplishments of women’s organizations such as temperance organizations and benevolent associations, mentioning a few notable women in the process. As early as the 1910s and 1920s, Charles and Mary Beard’s textbooks, among the most popular of their day, addressed the subject of women’s rights. By 1937, a few textbooks even discussed sex alongside other “controversial topics,” such as evolution, socialism, and pacifism.

Gradually, the new social science of anthropology as conceptualized by Franz Boas, Elsie Clews Parsons, Ruth Benedict, and Melville Herskovits challenged views of racial hierarchism that had, in the late nineteenth century, divided all cultures into three categories: savage, barbaric, and civilized. The
notion of cultural relativism gaining currency in anthropology in the 1930s supplanted genetically-based explanations of cultural difference with environmental ones. Relativism—cultural and otherwise—gradually spread more widely throughout mainstream American thought.  

Curriculum materials, except for those produced by black historians such as Carter G. Woodson, Charles Wesley, and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, either ignored African Americans or perpetuated stereotypes that were clearly racist in orientation. During the Red Scare of the 1920s and afterwards, ethnic organizations such as the Steuben Society of America, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith challenged negative representations of their group’s members, putting pressure on publishers to make changes to their publications. Still, racist representations in textbooks lingered for years.

The Psychological Compensation Phase: 1941-1980

During the middle decades of the twentieth century, the social studies shifted its orientation towards difference due in large measure to the cataclysmic changes produced by World War II and Cold War politics.

Social studies along with progressive education more generally moved away, albeit slowly, from its strict assimilationist position of earlier decades. New approaches consonant with the “life adjustment” emphasis in progressive education suffused the social studies with psychologically-oriented rationales justifying inclusion of ethnic and race-based material in the curriculum. Life adjustment goals harkened back to the social efficiency aims of an earlier era—that is, using education to fit students into their pegs in society. Race, ethnicity, and gender played an influential role in determining this fit. As this period unfolded, educators spoke less and less about using schools to reconstruct the social order, reflecting the influence of George Counts, a prominent and controversial social educator of the 1930s. Instead, accommodating students to society, rather than schools to children, became the chief aim. Concerns over the purportedly weak nature of the “ego identities” of minority groups, which were seen as inhibiting factors related to their life adjustment prospects, brought favorable reception for new demands to infuse cultural pluralism into the social studies curriculum. The following sentence, published in Social Education, provides a succinct, if rather awkward, statement of the perceived relationship between curriculum response and psychological need: “The cry for courses in Black history and culture has arisen in a new Black push for an invigorated collective ego-identity or group self-respect and self-direction.”

One of the most profound domestic effects of World War II on American society was resurgence of the civil rights movement, which, in turn, stimulated rebirth of the women’s movement. The war produced heightened consciousness among African Americans of their second class citizenship, just as it did among women, many of whom experienced both the stress and satisfaction that comes from working and living independently. After the war, neither group seemed eager to return to the status quo ante. Despite admonitions from some policymakers and pundits for these groups to put aside their demands concerning employment, politics, and legal rights in the name of “patriotism,” many African Americans and women demanded fuller participation in American society.

In many respects, both women and African Americans shared optimism that the gains achieved during the war would not be rolled back in the aftermath of victory. Furthermore, legal challenges to segregation and work force inequities by groups such as the NAACP and the National Urban League gained momentum in the 1940s and 1950s as worldwide efforts to fight fascism, Nazism, and later, communism, put a spotlight on the distance between American rhetoric about democracy and its practice at home. Publication in 1944 of Gunnar Myrdal’s An American Dilemma had a significant impact on education as well as other domains. New educational initiatives such as the Foxfire rural education movement in Tennessee, associated with Myles Horton and the Mississippi Freedom Schools, reflected ongoing concerns about the failed promise of democracy in American education and society. Likewise, social studies scholars, including notable figures such as Paul Hanna, championed incorporation of expanded international content in social studies curriculum materials at all grade levels.
Black scholars worked throughout these years to achieve educational recognition for the contributions of African Americans to American life. The *Negro History Bulletin*, *Journal of Negro History*, and *Journal of Negro Education*, in conjunction with school celebrations of Black History Week and Black History Month, highlighted these accomplishments. Scholars such as Edna Colson of Virginia State University, Marion Thompson Wright of Howard University, Merl Eppse of Tennessee State University, and Doxey Wilkerson of Virginia State and Howard Universities challenged the nation’s commitment to democracy, citizenship, and equal rights, calling on social education to embody these principles.

According to one analysis, “dramatic development” occurred in how minority groups were depicted in social studies textbooks during this period: “The old stereotypes fell into disuse.” Nevertheless, revised treatments did not banish racist or sexist depictions across the board. Over the course of many years, significant changes appeared in social studies materials reflecting emerging understandings from the social sciences about cultural, gender, and racial differences. By the end of this phase, textbooks devoted a few more pages to minorities and women than they had earlier. Moreover, the tone was less patronizing. Still, these changes proceeded unevenly; most curriculum materials reflected only token levels of engagement with matters of difference. Indeed, the vociferous reaction to the “unpatriotic” and “dangerous” textbooks of Harold Rugg during the first part of this period continued under the guise of Red-baiting many progressive educators and social studies teachers as the country fought the Cold War at home and abroad.

The intercultural education movement played an important role in responding to widespread social injustice during this period. Recognition of the cataclysm that became known as “the Holocaust” contributed to a sense of urgency concerning problems of prejudice. So, too, did acknowledgement of Japanese relocation camps and ongoing civil rights abuses here at home. The intercultural education movement featured school curriculum and extra-curricular assembly programs intended to spark discussion of cultural and religious differences in American life. Figures such as Leonard Covello, for forty-five years a teacher and principal in East Harlem, brought attention to the need to blend school with community. In social studies, Rachel Davis Dubois, Hilda Taba, William Van Til, and William Kilpatrick were all prominent proponents of intercultural education. Organizations such as the National Council of Christians and Jews, the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, and the NCSS joined forces to sponsor intercultural efforts, working in conjunction with the Bureau for Intercultural Education.

In 1945, the NCSS issued its sixteenth yearbook on the subject of Democratic Human Relations, with Taba and Van Til as editors. Van Til served as Director of Publications and Learning Materials for the Bureau for Intercultural Education. Taba was Director of the Intergroup Education in Cooperating Schools’ initiative of the American Council on Education. Joining them as contributor was noted black sociologist, Allison Davis. Davis was also the first African American professor to be tenured by the University of Chicago. Another author was Wanda Robertson, former principal of the elementary and nursery schools at the Japanese War Relocation Center in Topaz, Utah. In relatively short order, the NCSS had to reissue the yearbook twice because of high demand.

The NCSS archives indicate a significant level of engagement with issues of intercultural education during this time. Likewise, the record shows growing awareness of the hypocrisy and strains in the national educational fabric due to Jim Crow laws. In fact, NCSS representatives traveled south in the late 1940s to meet with black leaders about the particular challenges of Black education in this region. In 1954, the NCSS endorsed the Supreme Court decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, which called on states to desegregate public schools “with all deliberate speed.” In the 1960s and 1970s, the NCSS Committee on Racism and Social Justice sponsored “racism clinics” across the country, relying heavily on Fannie Shaffel’s role-playing techniques. Such efforts may be seen as small steps in the field’s growing acknowledgement of the political, as opposed to the merely interpersonal, dimensions of the problem of racism in American life.

Beginning in the 1960s and accelerating in the 1970s, NCSS editors published articles about minority groups and women in *Social Education*. Perhaps the high water mark for visibility of such publications can be found in the 1976 NCSS Task Force statement on Ethnic Studies Curriculum...
Guidelines. What is notable here is the degree to which these publications drew on the “psychological needs” framework for recasting curriculum, which became the new standard for inclusion of curriculum materials attentive to diversity in the social studies curriculum. According to this line of reasoning, compensating for past inequities in the education of minorities and women would improve prospects for healing the psychic damage caused by racism and sexism, thus offering them a better chance of becoming vital groups within American society. Such efforts could be seen in the many books and dissertations published in the 1970s, which scrutinized the treatment of minorities and women in social studies textbooks.

By the 1980s, many colleges and universities had created new academic departments focused on African American Studies, Chicano Studies, and Women’s Studies, among others. High schools offered “electives” concerned with racial and ethnic minorities; teachers infused relevant curriculum material into courses in history and civics. The NCSS added a committee on sexism to complement the one previously established on racism. Critics labeled these efforts as “tokenism” perpetuating the “victim” status of these groups. Nevertheless, change can be discerned, specifically in terms of curricular legitimation, visibility, and coverage within social studies materials of these groups’ contributions to American life.

The Knowledge Transformation Phase: 1981 to the Present

By the 1980s, the proliferation of feminist and multicultural scholarship had stimulated critiques of “knowledge construction” in many disciplines. Feminist scholars in the humanities and social sciences provided powerful analyses of the degree to which the Western canon was gendered. They introduced new concepts into the academic lexicon, such as “positionality,” which referred to the situated nature of all knowledge production, and its school-based counterpart, “perspective taking.” Multicultural scholars did the same, peeling away the racist thinking undergirding Western academic knowledge. In the 1990s, a few educational theorists produced post-colonial critiques extending the analysis of multicultural education scholars to considerations of the “hegemonic” assumptions found in disciplines supporting the social studies.

Despite these overtures, the label adopted for this section, “the knowledge transformation phase,” may reflect aspiration more than reality, as the period is young and the accomplishments, uneven. Still, it is clear that demands for inclusion of difference in social studies curriculum have gained legitimacy in many quarters. The scope of desired change, however, has also become more far reaching than in the past. Multiculturalists advocate a polyvocal and multilayered set of stories about American history and government rather than the nationalistic and triumphalist narratives that have dominated social studies to date. Within the last decade, progress towards these goals has met serious resistance from the standards and testing movements that have largely codified more traditional views of history.

Likewise, one of the major disappointments for proponents of new ways of thinking about difference in the social studies came with publication of the Handbook of Research on Social Studies Teaching and Learning in 1991. This volume captured few of the post-modernist curricular trends beginning to affect social studies, including only passing references to the impact of feminist thinking and post-colonialism on the field. As an evaluation of social studies growth and development, the Handbook offers a relatively static portrayal of the field, perhaps reflecting its editor’s belief that change in the social studies has, over time, amounted to little more than a few superficial and transitory ripples across a largely immobile body of water.

In fact, the degree to which change in dealing with difference has penetrated the surface of the social studies “lake” remains open to question. During the 1980s and 1990s, a shift did occur in the rationales offered for including difference and perspective taking in the social studies curriculum. No longer was the case made in terms of the cultural deficiency or psycho-social vulnerability of marginalized groups. Theorists concerned with diversity now demanded change from platforms stressing equity, fairness, and truth. James Banks and other multicultural and feminist scholars offered ladder-like schema for knowledge transformation, calling for a paradigm shift in the norms and standards used to determine what gets taught and how it gets taught in the social studies. They placed emphasis on
moving beyond “additive” and “contributions” oriented approaches to comprehensive overhauling of the social studies curriculum. Despite these calls, Jane Bernard-Powers noted in 1995 that the K-12 social studies curriculum had not been receptive to change and that women were still largely invisible.

In his comprehensive essay on the social studies, “Near Century’s End,” Stephen J. Thornton reviews several aspects of the field’s history pertinent to this analysis. He notes how divisive social studies scholars found debates over multiculturalism in the 1980s. By contrast with earlier periods, however, such debates centered less on whether multicultural content should be present in the curriculum and more on how much and on what terms. Authors of educational jeremiads, such as Arthur Schlesinger, Diane Ravitch, and others, argued that multicultural content was crowding out the founding fathers and other staples of American history, expressing concern that this educational approach would undermine national unity. Undoubtedly, high levels of immigration to this country since changes in the immigration laws in 1965 have contributed to renewed alarm about assimilation in American history. Furthermore, the “youth rebellion,” “sexual revolution,” ethnic studies, and feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s had led to the “culture wars” of the 1980s and 1990s, producing backlash over the aims and content of schooling.

In social studies, the most contentious battles were fought over the National Standards for History. Stories associated with this debacle will not be reviewed here. Suffice it to say that sociologist Nathan Glazer’s book title, We Are All Multiculturalists Now, offers insight into the ultimate verdict in these trials, despite notable rounds of backlash that continue to this day. Over the last ten years, many educational theorists and school practitioners have echoed Glazer’s sentiment. Concretely, social studies textbooks provided evidence of growing acceptance of multiculturalism. By the mid-1990s, visitors to NCSS conferences found major publishers touting newly rewritten textbooks with “complete” multicultural content promised in every chapter; making multiculturalism, oddly enough, a marketing ploy. In the wake of the September 11th tragedy, global educators fervently reminded the nation of the need to learn more about cross-cultural differences as well as home-grown ones.

Promulgated early in the 1990s, the NCSS curriculum standards allow sufficient scope for developing teaching materials balanced by race, gender, and other dimensions of difference. Little explicit attention to women’s lives worldwide, however, can be found in the curricular suggestions published with these standards. Quite possibly, the demands of multicultural educators had overshadowed those of the feminists. During this entire period, critics throughout academic life noted that feminists paid too little attention to race, ethnicity, and class, and multiculturalists, too little to gender.

Virtually no one in social studies seems to have paid much attention to gay and lesbian matters, at least as can be judged from the publications record. Not until 2002 did a social studies journal, Theory and Research in Social Education (TRSE), address homosexuality forthrightly. Editor Elizabeth Yeager published a special issue on sexual orientation and the social studies, featuring a number of articles reflecting rationales based on psychological compensation as well as knowledge transformation.

By contrast, scholarship in the academy on gay and lesbian studies has grown markedly over the last several decades. During this same period, human rights organizations have called attention to the perilous situation of gays and lesbians in schools and communities. These influences slowly found their way into the social studies world, which belatedly added consideration of sexuality to its publications. In his introductory essay to the special issue of TRSE on homophobia, Thornton captured the problem with the following question: “Does everybody count as human?”

Conclusion

Over the course of the twentieth century, changes in how the social studies curriculum addresses difference can be found. It is not accidental that those in positions of power to lead social studies in new directions also changed to some degree. For example, during the first half of the century, only one woman gained the presidency of the NCSS each decade; however, by the year 2000, three to four women were elected each decade. Likewise, far more women served as university professors, teacher educators, and influential spokespersons for the field than had been the case in early years. James Banks served as first
African American president of the NCSS in the 1980s and Jesus Garcia became the first Latino president of the NCSS in 2004. Despite these milestones, growth in the number of social studies theorists, professors, and teachers of color has increased only slowly.

Predicting the future course of social studies’ curricular engagement with these matters is risky business. Although Americans’ expressions of tolerance (at least to pollsters) are impressive, disagreements exist about addressing certain types of difference within the school curriculum, especially at the elementary level. Likewise, teaching about “controversial issues” related to these topics, such as the maldistribution of wealth in this country, nationalism, globalism, and the structural inequalities related to racism, remains taboo in many settings. Moreover, religious differences have once again become somewhat contentious due, in part, to the rise of religious fundamentalism in this country and overseas. Finally, the long-term effects of educational initiatives such as home schooling, charter schools, privatization, and vouchers, as well as standards and high-stakes testing on matters of difference in the social studies remain to be seen.

The field is, indeed, a shifting amalgamation of academic sub-groups and traditions. Note the tenuous position of geography, which has seen its fortunes within social studies rise and fall and rise again in recent years. The discipline of history has clamored consistently since the 1920s for more turf in social studies. Renewed efforts along these lines by organizations such as the American Historical Association and the National Center for History Education reflect curriculum theories suggesting that school subjects move from pedagogic and utilitarian ends to academic ones. In New York state, for example, the last few years have witnessed replacement of “global studies” with “world history and geography,” with curriculum aligned to standards promulgated by the World History Association and manifesting the growing prominence of this subject at the university level. The standards movement itself demonstrates the influence of greater attendance at college in the last twenty years. As a result, the field of social studies has moved in a disciplinary-oriented direction at the secondary level, one more aligned with approaches to curriculum favored by colleges.

Even so necessarily cursory a review as this one should suggest that, as turf battles and curricular contests have occurred, other skirmishes have also been fought over matters of difference within the social studies curriculum. Such conflicts provide ample evidence of the material and status consequences perceived to flow from distribution and redistribution of space in the social studies curriculum and the socially and politically sensitive nature of these adjustments. Each addition typically necessitates subtraction from an already overflowing curriculum. Knowledge transformation becomes a zero-sum game that reflects, in many people’s minds, consequences extending far beyond school walls, ones closely tied to the citizenship education mission of the social studies. Further investigation of the many features encompassed by the notion of dealing with difference in the social studies must be undertaken in order to fill in the gaps and test the hypotheses offered here.

How social studies has dealt with racial, ethnic, and gender differences speaks to how we, as Americans, view our national identity. Clearly, the field has come a distance from the days of Thomas Jesse Jones. The traditional curricular reticence on matters of religion and social class is not surprising, given our allegiance to secularism in the civic realm—yet holding, at the same time, strong commitments to privatized forms of religion as well as commerce and consumerism. Today’s social studies curriculum, in theory if not in practice, celebrates the notion that the tent shielding American society is a multicolored one, with lots of room for diverse attractions inside. If we are indeed, as sociologist Alan Wolfe suggests, “One nation after all,” then it seems fitting that the social studies curriculum should both promote and reflect this new civic identity.

NOTE: The author wishes to thank Stephen J. Thornton for his comments on an earlier draft of this article.

NOTES

1. Readers are encouraged to review pertinent works in the history of education, curriculum and the social studies that offer in-depth analyses of the forces shaping the field in the twentieth century. For example, Lawrence Cremin, The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957 (New York: Vintage

2. The issue of difference has been an ongoing concern of feminists as regards women’s status in democracy: Can one be different as well as equal? See, for example, the work of Carole Pateman, Iris Marion Young, Linda Nicholson, Mary G. Dietz, and Nancy Hartsock.


4. Given space constraints, the many historical reasons for change in the treatment of difference will be sketched out only in the broadest strokes. Likewise, the large subject of difference within the social studies curriculum will be limited to three dimensions: race, ethnicity, and gender. Defining difference in this fashion is a strategy designed to focus on several concerns pertinent to the field today, but this approach could also be employed in looking at other facets of difference in social studies curriculum, such as religion or class. For a broader analysis of the historical construction of difference in schooling, see David B. Tyack, “Constructing Difference: Historical Reflections on Schooling and Social Diversity,” *Teachers College Record* 95 (1993): 8-34.


10. The discussion of difference in this article should not be taken to imply the assumption that a certain identity (e.g., male, white, middle class, Protestant) represents the standard against which all other identities/cultures should be measured. Nevertheless, it is clear that the WASP (White, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant) male identity has held a disproportionate amount of power and thus been in a position historically of being able to define what is considered normative in American society.

11. I recognize that social studies cannot be taken as a unitary phenomenon for purposes of investigation; likewise, prescriptions about curriculum are not isomorphic with practice. The “field,” such as it exists in any real sense beyond a heuristic one, can readily be seen to operate at any moment on a variety of fronts: most obviously, in schools, as enacted by teachers and students in classrooms; in textbooks and other curriculum materials designed for social studies instruction at the kindergarten through grade twelve level; by means of official pronouncements and publications dispensed by authoritative sources such as the NCSS, teacher educators, educational scholars, state and local departments of education; and finally, in the articulation of social studies with those academic disciplines to which it is related, typically understood as history, geography, and the social sciences. The “action,” if you will, of social studies curriculum change takes place on a variety of fronts—some more central to the official loci of power in the field, the NCSS and prominent educational theorists in the early days, than others—but all ultimately bearing importance to shaping a field with as amorphous boundaries and as many practitioners and theorists as this one.
12. Ivor Goodson, “Aspects of a Social History of Curriculum,” *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 15, no. 4 (1983): 391-408, has laid out three hypotheses about the development of curriculum: 1) school subjects are not monolithic entities but shifting amalgamations of sub-groups and traditions, which will have an effect on the boundaries and priorities of subjects; 2) school subjects tend to move from promoting pedagogic and utilitarian emphases towards more academic ones; and 3) conflicts over school subjects involve status, resources, and territory. As organic entities within the dynamic world of schooling, curriculum fields are subject to many masters, especially so in a field as socially sensitive as the social studies. The least obvious of these three propositions is the second one, which I would apply to the social studies in this manner: During the twentieth century, the social studies has moved from an innovative and utilitarian emphasis on promoting citizenship to a greater emphasis on traditional disciplinary knowledge, the reasons for which have as much to do with general educational trends in the United States as they do with the evolution of the field itself. This issue will be addressed briefly at the end of this article.


18. I follow Herbert Kliebard’s approach to progressivism within education here, noting the variety of types of progressive educators, including the social efficiency group and the social meliorist group. For more detail, see Kliebard’s *The Struggle for the American Curriculum*; Stephen T. Correia, “For Their Own Good: An Historical Analysis of the Exceptional Thought of Thomas Jesse Jones” (Ph.D. diss., The Pennsylvania State University, 1993).


27. Crocco and Davis, “Bending the Future to Their Will,” 1-93.
32. Fedynck, 69.
37. Nathan Hare, “The Teaching of Black History and Culture in Secondary Schools,” *Social Education* 33, no. 4 (1969): 385-390. This article is part of an issue devoted to “Black Americans and Social Studies” and “Minority Groups in American Society.” The following year, an article in the journal reviews three decades of authorship, questioning the diversity within this group: June R. Chapin and Richard E. Gross, “A Barometer of the Minority Groups in American Society.”
39. See, for example, the set of essays compiled by Howard University historian Rayford W. Logan by leading black intellectuals, which was published under the title of *What the Negro Wants* by the University of North Carolina Press in 1944 (reissued, with a new introduction by Kenneth Robert Janken, Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).


45. See, by contrast, the description of the popular textbooks written by Mary Kelty for elementary schools, in Barton, “Mary Kelty’s Narratives of U.S. National History.”

46. Evans, 63-73; 132; 174-78; Fedyck makes the point that melting pot theories continued to persist into seventies-era textbooks, but that “America’s nonwhite minority groups provide many of the same authors [of textbooks] with fuel for the cultural pluralist interpretation.” (p.349). A few pages later, she notes the “ethnic pride” element of many new textbooks’ treatments of Indian, Chicano, and Asian Americans (p. 351). Note also the concerns about teacher loyalty oaths registered by NCSS presidents, as stated in their presidential addresses, during this period: Mark A. Previte, *A Commentary on the NCSS Presidential Addresses: 1936-1969, Bulletin Ten* (Washington, D.C.: The Foundations of the Social Studies Special Interest Group of the National Council for the Social Studies, 2002), especially pages 9-10.


51. Papers documenting these clinics can be found in the NCSS archives in the John Jarolimek papers, and those of the Committee on Racism and Social Justice, Milbank Library, Teachers College, Columbia University. A brief biographical essay on Fannie Shaftel is available in Crocco and Davis, eds., *Building a Legacy*, 117-118.

53. Examples include Fedycz; Nathan Glazer and Reed Ueda, Ethnic Groups in History Textbooks (Washington: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1983); Rupert Costo, ed., Textbooks and the American Indian (N.P.: American Indian Historical Society, 1970); Janice Trecker, “Women in U.S. History High-School Textbooks.”


55. Among the feminist challengers (only a very partial list) to the traditional Western canon in history are: Gerda Lerner, Joan Scott, Joan Kelly, Linda Kerber, Estelle Freedman, and Natalie Zemon Davis; in anthropology, Sherry Ortner, Gayle Rubin, Michelle Rosaldo, Carol Stack, Louise Lamphere, and Peggy Sanday. In African American studies, see Henry Louis Gates, Cornel West, Hazel Carby, Patricia Hill Collins, James Banks, James Anderson, Geneva Gay, and Gloria Ladson-Billings. Other feminist theorists whose work has been significant to education include Lorraine Code, Nel Noddings, Peggy McIntosh, and Jane Roland Martin. In social studies, such figures include Lynda Stone, Jane Bernard-Powers, Carole Hahn, and Linda Levstik.


58. See Symcox, Whose History? The Struggle for National Standards in American Classrooms.


64. See Banks, Multicultural Education, Transformative Knowledge & Action, especially chapter 1, as well as James Banks, An Introduction to Multicultural Education (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2002) for thorough discussions of differing approaches to multicultural education.

65. Although Schlesinger and Ravitch have turned their attention to other matters, David Warren Saxe has recently inveighed against multiculturalism in the social studies, “Patriotism versus Multiculturalism in Times of War,” Social Education 67, no. 2 (March 2003): 107-09.


70. Jonathan Zimmerman, Whose America?

71. The recent work of Merry Merryfield, the NCSS, and the American Forum for Global Education should be mentioned in this regard.

72. Asher and Crocco, “(En)gendering Multicultural Identities and Representations in Education.”

73. Multicultural education deals with groups other than African Americans, of course. In recent years, Valerie Pang, Marc Pruyn, and others have contributed articles concerned with Asians and Latino(a)s, respectively, to social studies publications; Frances Rains has written on Native American topics.

74. For an analysis of the presence of gender in teacher education textbooks, see Karen Zittleman and David Sadker, “Teacher Education Textbooks: The Unfinished Gender Revolution,” Educational Leadership (December 2002/January 2003): 59-63. The six social studies methods texts (Farris; Garcia & Michaelis; Martorella; McEachron; Parker; Savage & Armstrong) reviewed for their article “provide more space on the topic of gender than any other methods texts (2.5 percent of their content space)” (p. 60).


83. See Goodson, “Aspects of a Social History of Curriculum.”


88. Wolfe, One Nation After All.