

# More Than a Single Best Narrative: Collective History and the Transformation of Historical Consciousness

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## **ABSTRACT**

In establishing a collective history, past events are utilized to celebrate a nation's origins. While analysis of these events is often framed in knowing the single best narrative, the events themselves become of interest when examining how the interpretations remain the same or change over time. The recent bicentennial celebration of the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804 offers an opportunity to examine such a change. This article investigates how students revealed a historical consciousness in realizing what purpose the expedition serves to a national identity. After analyzing conversations occurring among three eighth-grade students, this article explores the student responses to three interpretations, which bears important educational consequences and implications for the teaching and learning of history.

In a presidential proclamation issued on June 28, 2002, President George W. Bush delivered a call to citizens of the United States, henceforth referred to as Americans, to “commend [the] resourcefulness, determination, and bravery” of Meriwether Lewis, William Clark and the members of the Corps of Discovery. Their involvement in what came to be known as the Lewis and Clark expedition, <sup>1</sup> he continued, set “courageous Americans on a remarkable voyage that changed our nation” (Lewis and Clark Bicentennial, 2002). Declaring 2003 through 2006 as the official Lewis and Clark bicentennial celebration, the proclamation championed the spirit of hard work for which the United States is renowned. This proclamation is only one indication of the significance the expedition continues to hold in defining the U.S. nation and its continuous presence in the American consciousness. At the most general level, the proclamation indicates the significance the Lewis and Clark expedition holds in the American consciousness about how the United States developed as a nation. Although

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Curriculum Inquiry 38:5 (2008)

Published by Wiley Periodicals, Inc., 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA, and 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK

doi: 10.1111/j.1467-873X.2008.00437.x

the expedition's bicentennial has come and gone, the feverish activities that continue to surround the expedition (documentaries, reenactments, popular history books, etc.) affirms its defining role in U.S. history. Over the past 200 years, the Lewis and Clark expedition has undergone numerous revisions and alterations in an effort to create a collective understanding of the expedition's significance (and Lewis and Clark's own contributions to U.S. nation building) that is suited to the particularities of historical time.

In public school classrooms, the Lewis and Clark expedition is a common topic that is framed, almost always, as an event that established the United States as a stable and orderly nation within an expanded geographical boundary. It often employs themes such as the "discovery" of an empty land, the "survival" of the fittest in natural unexploited areas, and the self-made man of a "frontier" society, particularly in the required classroom textbooks (Appleby, Brinkly, Broussard, McPherson, & Ritchie, 1999; Armento et al., 1999; Danzer, Klor de Alva, Krieger, Wilson, & Woloch, 2005). The expedition has been claimed either as a scientific quest, a military expedition, a commercial enterprise, or as a tour. It does not hold one clear and distinct meaning, and any suggestion that it does runs the risk of confusing outcomes for motives and threatens to obscure the essentially transitional quality of the era in which the expedition took place and the subsequent centennial and bicentennial celebrations. Yet, this is often what we ask of students as we ply them with multiple source documents from which they are to gain an unquestioned sense of importance about an epic event such as the expedition. It remains an emblematic event that has become an American master narrative, presented primarily as part of the Manifest Destiny that defined the geographic boundaries of the United States in the early 1800s. Despite the continued societal focus on the Lewis and Clark expedition and its secured place in middle and high school history curriculum, rarely has there been widespread or consistent examination of what students come to understand about the expedition and how its authoritative position within the curriculum and classroom is maintained over time.

Researchers have begun to examine how students have moved beyond the procedural concepts to develop a historical consciousness, which aids in examining the complex connectedness of past interpretations and present perceptions of an event (Lee & Ashby, 2000; Seixas, 2002). The challenge to develop a historical consciousness in our students is to examine how they can go beyond what Seixas (2004, p. 6) has termed a *deliberate blinding*, or the choosing of only one selective historical representation to understand the past. Despite the prevalence of students being asked to examine evidence, consider conflicting accounts, and establish cause, few researchers would argue that success at these levels represents the solution to the shortcoming of a broad historical knowledge base (e.g., Shemilt, 2000). Seixas (2004) argues the necessity of students knowing a

“usable history” that allows for distinguishing what meanings the past holds in the present. Notable in the move toward examining student development of a historical consciousness is exploring how students engage in the academic endeavor of history itself. Although there are many arguments about student ability to engage critically with history (Nash, 1995; Nash & Dunn, 1995) and to develop the habits of mind of historians (Holt & Wolf, 1990), little research has directly examined how students engage in questioning the purpose served by particular historical interpretations (for exception, see Seixas & Peck, 2004; Wineburg, Mosborg, Porat, & Duncan, 2007) and, specifically, how these interpretations permeate (or not) their present conceptions of past events.

In this article, I explain how three students worked to develop a rudimentary historical consciousness during a 6-month research project. I explore how three eighth-grade students developed an understanding about what purpose the Lewis and Clark expedition served in defining a national identity. As a historical event that remains a pervasive cultural symbol within the U.S. consciousness, institutions and individuals continually draw upon the event to construct a national identity, to affirm public values, and to promote certain political interests (Ambrose, 1996; Moulton, 2003). It is often a historical narrative that remains unquestioned in a history classroom. By focusing on how students understand the expedition, I show what they think about history itself and the struggles associated with history as an intellectual endeavor. I am particularly interested in how students take up the call advocated by R. G. Collingwood (1946/1995) many years ago that the ultimate aim of history is not to know the past but to understand the present. While such a task for secondary school students may seem daunting to many, this article shows how students transformed Collingwood’s idea of recovering the meaning behind a particular historical event and what purpose it serves in the present day.

To show how students can acquire a historical consciousness, I present excerpts from a larger research study situated in a grade-eight history classroom (Trofanenko, 2007). I argue that the three students show evidence of developing a historical consciousness. I begin this article by showing how students conceptualize the changing representations and public presentations of the Lewis and Clark expedition as represented in the St. Louis World’s Fair of 1904 and *Lewis and Clark in Indian Country*, an exhibition held at the Newberry Library in Chicago in 2004, and what contributions the expedition serves to present-day national identity. To that end, I consider two questions that directed the research that frames this article. First, what might encourage students to raise questions about the narratives of historical events like the Lewis and Clark expedition? Second, what might we learn about history instruction by trying to make history an object of students’ own study? To better argue that students can indeed question the purpose that past events hold in the present era, I present excerpts of student conversations within their classroom and in a public

exhibition space. I focus on how various representations of the Lewis and Clark expedition that define a collective national identity presents a pedagogical dilemma for students. In using student comments from interviews and discussions about the Lewis and Clark expedition in both the classroom and in a public exhibition space, I show how students worked through and questioned how the varying interpretations of the expedition changed over time.

### **TOWARD A HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS**

The common public rhetoric concerning history education focuses primarily on the lack of student knowledge of historical fact. The calls for a U.S.-centric canon of historical knowledge advance the belief that there is a specific history students ought to know that distinguishes the United States from other nations (Finn, 2003). Despite the claims that U.S. students lack sufficient knowledge of the nation's past, as measured by recall on national examinations such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2006), the history presented in classrooms is frequently that which presses an expected degree of patriotism and nationalism. The role history serves in defining a national identity is frequently unquestioned, with particular narratives utilized to justify collective characteristics. Yet, the continued focus on historical factual knowledge falls short of engaging students in asking the substantive questions about the past, its association with history, and why a collective national identity is advanced.

Although historical knowledge about past events that inherently define a nation remains the focus within history education, more recent research has concentrated primarily on how students conceptualize a relationship between history and national identity. A large body of research completed by Barton and colleagues (Barton, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c; Barton & McCully, 2003) examined the connection elementary students make between history and identity. The cross-national comparative study of Northern Ireland and the United States contrasted the narratives of national development featured in learning history and clarified the underlining premises of historical representation in each country. In both countries, history education remains connected to various political, social, and cultural factors. For the students in the United States, studying history forms a connection to "us" and works to advance a narrative of national development that shows history as their story. In Northern Ireland, studying history emphasizes antiquity, social history, or a strict chronology of past events. The Irish focus of history education is developing those historical skills necessary to study other societies and the ways in which other groups live.

A more recent study by Barton and McCully (2005) focuses on secondary students in Northern Ireland. They illustrate how students initially do not

accept historically dependent identities studied formally in schools. Rather, the students draw selectively from various sources, including school curriculum and community resources. As the students move through the required curriculum, though, their identification with a particular national identity is strengthened. How a national identity is affirmed by history does have both affordances and constraints (Barton & Levstik, 2004). Barton and Levstik (2004) suggest the need to acknowledge the predominant themes explicit in U.S. national narrative (specifically, freedom and progress) as well as deliberating the multiple interpretations of such themes within a pluralistic framework. Such an examination would promote national identities that encourage inclusiveness that do not dismiss other identities but are important to its citizens.

The current concern about students' lack of historical understanding of either historical fact or the relationship between history and national identity has been countered by a broad body of research within history education. Over the past 20 years, scholars in history education in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada have worked to unpack and understand how students make sense of history, how students engage in historical inquiry, and how both knowledge formation and historical inquiry are successful (or not) in school classrooms. This research has drawn attention to the particular perspectives and attitudes, along with skills, that students require to engage in historical investigation (see, for example, Stearns, Seixas, & Wineburg, 2000; Wineburg, 2001). Much of this research has focused on examining how students develop competence in the "historical ways of making sense of what is learned" from the past (Lee & Ashby, 2001, p. 47). Lee and Ashby's (2001) explicit intent of history education focuses specifically on the procedural ways students learn about the past. Seixas (1996) has provided a framework that clarifies these second-order or procedural concepts, identifying them as significance, agency, empathy, epistemology and evidence, continuity and change, and progress and decline. While some educators in the United States argue that students do understand the procedural elements of history and engage with changing interpretations and differing sources of historical information (Cornbleth, 2002; Epstein, 1998), others are arguing for the development of a historical sensibility that engages students to examine and demystify how various symbolism and narratives tropes are adopted as wide-scale reflections of the past (Farley, 2006; Simon, 2006; Van Sledright, 2002).

More recently, historical consciousness has become a topic of discussion within history education. The theoretical stance of historical consciousness, a term and concept used primarily by scholars working on German history, distinguishes between knowing history and understanding how this history is utilized for various purposes. In its simplest sense, historical consciousness is the awareness of a past (Figlio, 2003). It seeks to examine various forms of history, including individual, familial, and national history by the

academic, professional, and amateur historians, to understand how the past is represented in specific contexts and the extent to which the past is understood as influencing or acting upon the present (Macdonald, 2006). As Elizabeth Tonkin (1992) has noted, how the past is remembered is the result of a procedure that takes place in the present, and involves remaking the past in terms of present concerns. Often, the term *historical consciousness* has been used interchangeably with *collective memory* (Funkenstein, 1989; Nora, 1989; Nora & Kritzman, 1996). It differs from collective memory in that it is a reflexive and metaperspective engagement with history that examines ways of relating to the past. While historical consciousness has received far greater attention in academic history and museum studies (see, for example, Crane, 2000; Macdonald, 2000, 2003), a more recent consideration has been made in the field of history education (Lee, 2004; Sandwell, 2006; Seixas, 2004).

Historical consciousness draws on a frame of reference, or a contextualization, of an event. It involves recognizing that historical events are set in both space and time. The current focus on historical consciousness within history education draws primarily from Rüsen's (1989) work, which seeks to examine how people define some aspect of the past as history, and how they understand history as set within a temporary relationship between the past, the present, and the future. For Rüsen (1989), developing a historical consciousness requires moving from considering the past in a traditional sense (being a simple acceptance of a historical interpretation), to the exemplary sense (being able to demonstrate single case rules and principles), to the critical sense (being able to raise moral reasoning) to the generic sense (being able to historicize, or place into historical context, an interpretation of an event). This generic sense involves developing a capacity to derive understanding in the present from events occurring in the past. In the instance of the Lewis and Clark expedition, such a stance would support a shift from the preoccupation with an unquestioned acceptance of a past event, to knowing the significance of establishing a critical point of view of the explicit educational purpose that such an event holds for the student.

## **RESEARCH CONTEXT**

### **Hampton High School**

Hampton High School (all school, student, and teacher names are pseudonyms) is a grade 8 to 12 school located in a small urban center in the United States Midwest. Hampton High School began as a college preparatory school in 1876, and became a laboratory school associated with the local university in 1910. The focus of the school is to advance students' academic achievements in order to

spark the creative fervor and high aspirations of talented young people; to inspire them to excellence; to challenge them through traditional and experimental strategies; to ignite their potential for active, responsible involvement in the adult world; and to influence positively the larger educational community. (Hampton High School, 2006)

The curriculum reflects this mission by providing required courses and electives along with courses offered at the local university. Students complete the state requirements for graduation in addition to completing school-specific courses (including physical education, health education, computing sciences, and elective courses).

The application requirements for any student wishing to attend the school a demonstrated strong school record, strong academic motivation, the completion of the Secondary School Admissions Test (SSAT), and evidence of creativity, initiative, and leadership. While there is a strong belief within the community that Hampton High accommodates students who are academically gifted, the grade point average for this cohort ranged between 2.25 and 4.00 (on a four-point scale). The racial/ethnic makeup of the student body is 63% Caucasian, 26% Asian American, 5% African American, 5% Hispanic, and 1% American Indian.

### **Classroom Context**

The focus of the first 6 weeks of the course was for the students to demonstrate how they understood the relationship between historical events and the formation of a collective U.S. identity. The students were asked to consider how history was utilized to define a national identity with particular collective and common stories. After listing and discussing five major themes evident in establishing the U.S (the organization of a political system, wars and conflicts, settlement and expansion, the development of social programs, and the United States in current world affairs), Mr. Salaby, the history teacher, selected the theme of settlement and expansion. As one of the many events that expanded the U.S. landmass, Mr. Salaby selected the Lewis and Clark expedition as the example of an event that is regarded to be a significant event. At the time of the study, the bicentennial celebrations were under way, which presented an opportunity to examine its historicity and to understand how the celebration of such a historical event changed over time. Mr. Salaby selected the expedition because of its timeliness; the availability of resources including maps, historical narratives, copies of materials from the World's Fair, and current-day textbook excerpts; and the various public proclamations (including President Bush's proclamation on June 28, 2002) that claimed its significance in establishing the nation.

Prior to beginning the project, Mr. Salaby reviewed with the students how to engage in historical analysis and interpretation. He outlined for the



students the three elements he considered necessary to begin any historical inquiry. He explained to the students how to closely read the source materials presented (by identifying who wrote the artifact, examining the language used, and understanding what was written), the need to situate the materials into a framework for developing contextual understandings, and to identify agreement and disagreement in the information presented in the materials.

He noted the need for students to recognize that historical inquiry is more than examining sources. He suggested that to understand the past, students need to closely consider the traces of the past. Students were then directed to select information from the sources to interpret a particular event. Although there may well have been more than one interpretation of any event, Mr. Salaby continually reminded the students of the need to not accept only one version. He focused on having the students consider the claims of certainty that are often supported by source materials. His main pedagogical concern had to do with the students' ability to question what is offered to them as truth and fact. To this end, he directed the students to an activity that shows how texts—whether written, oral, or visual—are an interpretive experience for those who created the text and for those who received it. Here, Mr. Salaby introduced his historical inquiry concepts—identifying the source, contextualizing the source, reading the source, and corroborating the source—to the Lewis and Clark expedition project. He introduced the focus of the project—to understand how one particular historical event remains a prevalent event in the present day—by providing the students with the specific context in which to examine the Lewis and Clark expedition:

The Lewis and Clark expedition is customarily taught as a remarkable beginning with a noble purpose—to expand the United States as a nation. At various points in the past, the commercial and settlement purposes of the expedition has given way to other purposes. How has the Lewis and Clark expedition defined the United States? How has its past and current celebrations contributed to building a national identity?

During the first 6 weeks, the students were presented with a sequence of documentation about the expedition. The first set of documents included copies of the Jefferson letter to Congress (January 18, 1803) requesting funding for the expedition; the Jefferson letter to Lewis (April 27, 1803) providing the directives for the expedition, the Lewis letter to Clark (1803) requesting his involvement, journal writings from Lewis, Clark, and other Corps members; and copies of the completed journal sent to Jefferson in 1834. The second set of documents included copies of literary writings about the expedition at the end of the 19th century, and documents about the 1904 St. Louis Exposition. The third set of documents included online resources offered up by historical societies (including [www.lewis-clark.org](http://www.lewis-clark.org))



and [www.lewisclark200.org](http://www.lewisclark200.org)), museum displays such as Lewis and Clark Mapping the West at the Smithsonian Institute ([www.si.org](http://www.si.org)), and public celebrations specific to the bicentennial celebrations. The traditional utilization of primary and secondary source materials set the groundwork for the students to formulate an understanding of the original intent of the expedition. Once the students examined the source materials, as set out by Mr. Salaby, they were to then cull what information could be obtained from the sources, identify what information could not be gained, and offer conjecture about the purpose such information held to defining the United States as a nation.

### **Participants**

Mr. Salaby holds advance degrees in history from the University of Chicago. He arrived at Hampton High 5 years prior to the study, and at the time of the study was the head of the social studies department. As a historian, his courses focused primarily on developing student knowledge about what constitutes history and the historical method and, as department head, he established several student requirements in the social studies courses to meet this goal. In each social studies course, all of the students were required to complete an oral history project focusing on either a specific community event or an individual or group within the community. The students worked within the classroom on such projects until ready to collaborate with local community-based organizations and resources.

Alexis McGregor, Joaquin Santos, and Samuel T. Jones, the three students who participated in this study, entered the school the previous year. All three students held a B average. Alexis and Sam were Caucasian; Joaquin was Hispanic. These students agreed to be a part of this study following the presentation of information to the complete class of students and their parents during a general information meeting held during the first week of school. Initially, 13 of the 23 students (and their parents) agreed to be a part of the study. I selected 6 students out of the 13 who signed up in consultation with Mr. Salaby. The six students self-selected their own groups of three. One group was all male; the group I selected was one female and two males. I selected Alexis, Joaquin, and Sam's group based on their ethnic and gender makeup (the other group of three were white male students). Also, Alexis, Joaquin, and Sam had worked together previously and wished to remain together during the term. The other three students were not willing to form a group for the complete semester.

In this research project, I continued to be attentive to Bloom's (1997) urging that researchers be aware of "their own histories, values, and assumptions that they bring into the field to simultaneously decrease the sense that they are neutral, objective observers" (p. 112). I began this study with the assumptions that students can, indeed, move toward a more criti-

cal understanding of past events by situating them within a temporal framework; that is, developing an understanding about what purpose the event holds at various points in time. Initially, my interest in conducting research at Hampton High was purely pragmatic as I had access to the site within a community proximal to my work. As a permanent resident in the United States, I was interested in how particular events like the Lewis and Clark expedition transcend their original occurrence and become more than a past event. The translation of this one event continues to inundate current U.S. history and national identity through memorials, conferences, place names, and so forth. My interest was whether students move beyond the traditional examination of source materials related to the event to see what value the event maintains over time.

Throughout the research project, I maintained a role of participant observer by working with the students both individually and in groups in the classroom. My daily presence in the classroom throughout the semester resulted in changes to the interactions I had with the three students in the study. Our initial conversations at the beginning of the semester were guarded, with little information gained from the students. At first, they would not answer the questions asked and would work at the table farthest from where I sat in the classroom. After 2 weeks, Alexis McGregor approached me during class time to ask for clarification of my research project and research goals. Over the course of the semester, my interactions with Alexis, Joaquin, and Sam moved from being formal and directly related to the interview questions to more in-depth discussions. I was able to ask more probing questions to further explore their comments and conversations.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

During the 2005–2006 school year, I conducted research at Hampton High where I observed one grade-eight classroom of 23 students enrolled in a required social studies course. Over 6 months, from August to January, I attended the classroom on a daily basis to gather data from the two sources, specifically from Mr. Salaby and from Alexis McGregor, Joaquin Santos, and Samuel T. Jones. I gathered field notes of observations of Mr. Salaby's teaching and his interactions with the students within the classroom during the 60-minute classes. In addition to daily conversations with Mr. Salaby, I also interviewed him formally each month throughout the study. The semistructured and open-ended interviews served to provide additional information about his teaching philosophies, his pedagogical strategies, and his reflections on the project. These interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes and were recorded and transcribed.

The data gathered from the students included classroom observations, semistructured open-ended interviews, and transcriptions of taped group

conversations of the three students. The observational field notes focused primarily on the interactions between the students and Mr. Salaby and among themselves while in group work. Each student was interviewed individually within the first week of the study, and twice over the duration of the study both individually and in their group. Each interview lasted between 20 and 45 minutes and were audiotaped and transcribed. The taped group conversations among the three students were transcribed and coded. Additional data sources were collected from the students including the curriculum materials associated with the course along with essays and other school work. To receive feedback and as a check on my interpretations, I shared the transcripts and analysis of the interviews and observations with Mr. Salaby and the three students.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of interview and observation data occurred throughout data collection as well as after data collection was completed and followed the process described by Strauss and Corbin (1998) as the “constant comparative method.” This iterative process occurred through reflective and analytical memorandums I wrote as well as through the ongoing coding of the observational field notes. In particular, I analyzed the interviews for recurring themes and patterns regarding student perceptions of how historical events evolved over time for the sake of developing a definition of nation.

Any analysis of the student conversations attempts to make meaning so that it makes sense to the researcher. There is, however, not one single meaning. The most that can be offered are the themes that can be contextualized by time and space. The patterns of phrases, ideas, and responses prompted me to construct an understanding about how these particular three students examined the Lewis and Clark expedition. The analysis I offer emerges from their understanding of representations of the expedition at the 1904 World’s Fair and the Newberry Library exhibit that seeks to link the representations with the initial event of 1803.

Two themes emerged as the most salient in the connection between the Lewis and Clark expedition and the students developing a historical consciousness, associated specifically with the centennial and bicentennial celebrations. The first, the World’s Fair of 1904, concerns how Lewis and Clark seem to be understood as potentially entailing a romanticizing and a suspension of the critical. The second, the exhibit *Lewis and Clark in Indian Country* at the Newberry Library, concerns a parallel narrative of the expedition that challenges the public fascination with Indigenous groups. Both themes show how the students struggled over understanding the physical representation of the Lewis and Clark expedition and how this understanding clarifies how past events are objectified because it is thought to hold significance to a nation.

## AN UNDERSTANDING OF CONTINUITY AND PERSISTENCE

The physical traces of the past offer up a representation that the three students in their present conversations worked to understand even while, at the same time, realizing the original intent of the expedition. This is the dilemma of working toward a historical consciousness. In the case of the students response to St. Louis World's Fair in 1904, as I present below, the question about how the fair is received a century later is especially pertinent. The World's Fair was public exhibition that was a part of a carefully constructed identity-building project and its centennial celebrations of the Lewis and Clark expedition as Manifest Destiny was supposedly reflective of a persistent U.S. identity. Similarly, the students engaged the question of a public exhibition that sought to make more evident the relationship between Lewis and Clark and the Native groups situated along the route. In both instances, the students did not directly respond to the particular events as sources from which knowledge was to be gained. Rather, they extended the larger issues concerning historical representation in each instance.

### **“Wrestling Wilderness From the Savage Beasts”: Understanding an Event as Nostalgia**

Prior to 1904, the Lewis and Clark expedition remained obscure to most Americans (Moulton, 2003). This changed with the centennial celebration of Lewis and Clark where they were remembered in popular literature, reprints of the original expedition journals, and a World's Fair (which was also referred to as the Manifest Destiny centennial). In the following conversation, held 6 weeks into the study, the students spoke about how Lewis and Clark were regarded at the World's Fair in 1904. Alexis began this conversation by having identified the language and terms presented in the popular literature of the day. In working through such documents, the students identified the descriptive language used to generalize the characteristics of those involved in the expedition, as well as realizing the hyperboles presented in the literature:

Alexis [reading an entry in the World's Fair bulletin]: Listen to this.

“The heroes of Homer's *Iliad* were engaged in petty achievements when compared with the work of the men who wrestled a vast wilderness from savages and wild beasts and made it the seat of twenty great commonwealths in a single century.”

Joaquin: What does this mean?

Alexis: The men who settled the country [indicating quotation marks] “wrestled wilderness from savages and wild beasts.”

Sam: So?

Alexis: That those who went into the wilderness. [They were] Strong, adventurous, persistent.

Sam: You would have to be.

Joaquin: Yeah, but to wrestle from the savages. I don't know. That is exaggerated, isn't it? They were sent, remember.

Alexis: To do a diplomatic mission with the Natives.

Sam: Yeah, but they had to be strong in order to do it.

Joaquin: Do what?

Sam: To wrestle the land from the Indians.

Alexis: Are you serious? They didn't wrestle the land. It tells of the kind of people needed to wrestle the land.

Sam: What?

Alexis: The kind of people that settled here.

Joaquin: Those are just stereotypes of who they [the U.S. government] wanted the settlers to be.

In identifying how the individual characteristics of those involved with the Lewis and Clark expedition superseded the distinctiveness of Homer's *Iliad*, Alexis initiated a group discussion about how the Lewis and Clark expedition was presented at a World Exposition and centennial celebrations. Alexis pointed to how Lewis and Clark, as individuals, were given new identities that translated into characteristics attributed to a country. What was once individual identities endorsed along with a monumental undertaking in defining the nation were forged into a singular national identity through populist expressions of the expedition at the World's Fair. Here, Lewis and Clark were no longer individuals heroically battling the wilderness on the expedition, but the epitome of the kinds of people who helped to build the U.S. nation through their hard work and determination.

In a later conversation, Alexis grappled with how the expedition was, even after 100 years, translated into a nostalgic rendition of a past event. She talks about how the expedition initially supported a large-scale scientific exploration and how, more recently, it has become central in the United States' national identity:

I think it [the Lewis and Clark expedition] is more important now than what it was then. You know how there are such a big deal being made of the expedition. It was an epic quest, like they [Lewis and Clark] wrote in their journals. For me, it's like "Oh no, not another bicentennial!" [Interviewer: Why the concern?] It's become too much. It is more now that what it ever was then. It was something really big. A 3-year journey is a long time. It was more than a military action. It was to settle land and do the exploration and to get to the northwest coast and a water system to there. But now, it isn't like the journey is that important. It isn't the exploration that's important. It isn't what they found and who they found that's important. [Interviewer: It was important, wasn't it? Why is it not as important now?] All that's important now is how we, you know, all of us are adventurous and strong and committed to being really good Americans and having that American spirit that Lewis and Clark had.

There were moments in this conversation when Alexis reflected on the past with the nostalgia that continues to celebrate the Lewis and Clark expedition as a defining moment in U.S. nationalism. For Alexis, the expedition

became an event that portrayed Lewis and Clark as individuals possessing personal characteristics that reflected a necessary physical strength and persistence. She noted how the expedition had been translated into a major event for establishing a national identity. In suggesting that Lewis and Clark's successes held more importance than previously, she alluded to how a larger sense of a national identity continued to be conceded by the expedition. She ironically noted how such mythologizing has defined a current American spirit, and one in which she expressed fatigue.

In his response to the World's Fair, Joaquin realized that the expedition became a celebration of the U.S. spirit. This prompted his concerns about exaggerations and stereotypes presented in the literature. He questioned the language used to describe Lewis and Clark, identifying how the idea of taming the west was not necessarily the main purpose of the expedition, and thus, not relevant to the stature bestowed on Lewis and Clark. He did note in the following conversation that attributing such characteristics fed directly into a stereotype:

It's not that Lewis and Clark weren't the poster children. It's just that it's [Lewis and Clark and the expedition] become some big deal and some really big event that [people] did not really consider how hard it was. You know, a 3-year trek. The winters. Unfamiliar areas. [Interviewer: What was different with the St. Louis World's Fair?]. That's it. The fair. Of course, you want to present the best of the best to the world. It just becomes more than what it actually was without really looking back to the evidence of what they did. [Interviewer: So, it was an exaggeration and a stereotype?] Yeah, and it just got worse over time.

In suggesting the representations of Lewis and Clark and the expedition were celebratory, Joaquin notes how the personalities of Lewis and Clark transcended what the expedition sought to achieve. Certainly, any World's Fair will celebrate a nation's successes and society's advances. But Joaquin raised questions about how the fair itself became the medium through which the expedition became more than its initial event. The scientific and societal advances that were celebrated at the World's Fair were beyond the scope of the expedition. The celebration of the characteristics displayed by Lewis and Clark transcended the original purpose of the expedition, notably discovering a route to the Pacific and charting unfamiliar territories. Joaquin noted, in a previous conversation held 3 weeks into the study, the importance of the expedition at the time of its occurrence. Following, he referred to how the expedition's initial purpose was lost by remembering particular elements:

[Lewis and Clark] went on the expedition. We [the United States] did it because we needed to know what was there. [Interviewer: So, what has changed?] The expedition hasn't changed. It's the expedition and it still happened. There is lots of proof of that. What has changed is how it's remembered in ways that are different from the past.

In the series of conversations, Joaquin noted the changed identities ascribed to Lewis and Clark. He specifically remarked on how flexible identities had been used in the past, suggesting a self-conscious definition of how identity changes over time and the ways such definitions are interrelated.

Sam's comments differed from that of both Alexis and Joaquin over the 1904 representations of the expedition. In the initial conversation about the association between those involved in the expedition and Homer's *Iliad*, Sam contributed little to the discussion. He noted ironically how those involved sought to wrestle land from the Natives. He explained this irony through a conversation about how Natives were labeled:

Maybe that's how they viewed Natives then. You know, the whole savage thing. Wild Indians. It was a time when Indians were put on display. By making Indians appear wild makes Lewis and Clark appear stronger. We make them look bad so we can look good. [Interviewer: Does this still happen?] No. They [Native Indians] are more outspoken now. I don't think it would happen now. [Interviewers: The display?] NO! Not a display but them staying silent.

Sam spoke directly to the current-day concerns expressed by Native Indians regarding Indigenous representation. Although he did not explain in detail the issues about Indigenous representation or Native Indian presence at the World's Fair, he did draw a conclusion about how Lewis and Clark were positioned by the general beliefs about Indians at that time. He concluded that our knowledge about how Lewis and Clark and the individual characteristics they possessed can only be understood by contrasting them to the view held by society toward Native Indians in 1904. He referred specifically to the present-day concerns of Indigenous peoples concerning not only public representations but also public expressions.

Throughout the study, Sam consistently referred to the Native Indians, their roles in the expedition, and how they were regarded in the documents. His conversations encompassed considerations of such matters as popular expectations or assumptions about how Native Indians should be represented in particular contexts, and the extent to which the past treatment of Native Indians is understood as acting upon the present.

### **“The Other Side of the Story”: Understanding an Alternative Narrative**

While the students completed the Lewis and Clark project, the Newberry Library had developed and displayed the exhibit *Lewis and Clark in Indian Country* as part of the bicentennial celebrations from 2003 to 2006. The exhibition sought to confront the common narrative of discovery of uninhabited and unknown lands frequently normalized in school textbooks. The exhibition began with a premise that challenged the Lewis and Clark expedition as an initial westward expansion that civilized a savage



wilderness. The exhibition told of Lewis and Clark venturing into land already occupied by Indigenous groups, and that the aftermath of the expedition impacted the legal, cultural, and physical well-being of Indigenous peoples by establishing government policy specific to land ownership and Indigenous removal (Cook-Lynn, 2004). The Newberry's exhibit sought to tell, as noted in press releases, the "other side of the story." The exhibition featured various books, manuscripts, maps, artwork, and photography from the library's American Indian and American history collections. In keeping with the library's commitment to public engagement, the exhibition also provided an obvious collaborative work with scholars from Indian communities along the Lewis and Clark trail (including scholars from the Blackfeet, Mandan-Hidatsa, Nez Perce, Umatilla, and Chinook communities). The exhibition, which consisted of four sections,<sup>2</sup> provided a Native perspective on a shared American event to show how the Native Americans assisted the expedition and the necessary alliances and partnerships between Lewis and Clark and Native Indian groups in order for the expedition to be completed. Although the students were required to attend the complete exhibition, Mr. Salaby directed them to focus primarily on the second section of the exhibit.

Alexis, Joaquin, and Sam, along with their classmates, attended the Newberry exhibit over a 3-day visit to Chicago. They met with various curators, the Native scholars, and public speakers associated with the exhibition's development. Once in the exhibition galleries, the three students were reminded of the initial focus of the project—how the Lewis and Clark expedition defined the U.S. nation—and to consider how the exhibition's alternative narratives served such a purpose. The students were directed to examine both the text panels and the displayed objects of the complete exhibit. Alexis, Joaquin, and Sam focused specifically on the portion of the exhibit "Crossing the Indian Country, 1804–1806," and in particular the events surrounding the refuge Lewis and Clark took with the Nez Perce. Prior to focusing specifically on this second portion of the exhibit, the trio (along with their classmates) had completed an initial walk-through of the galleries with various curators and with Mr. Salaby. Alexis, Joaquin, and Sam selected this particular section primarily because of the disagreement they held about the specific purpose the expedition served (as noted in their discussion above held in the classroom at the beginning of the project). This section showed the increasing diplomatic purpose the expedition served, and the needed support from the Native Indians along the route.

In this conversation, Alexis, Joaquin, and Sam react to a field map displayed in the exhibit, which showed the area where Lewis and Clark arrived at Weippe Prairie. Together with a journal entry from Clark noting "from this mountain I could observe high rugged mountains in every direction as far as I could see," pictures illustrating the dugouts utilized by Lewis and Clark, and a narrative of how Lewis and Clark spent time with the Nez Perce, the students held a conversation about the relationship between

Lewis and Clark and Indigenous peoples. Alexis noted from the written text panels how the expedition needed support from the Nez Perce to continue the route to the ocean. In this conversation, the three students realize the developing relationship between Lewis and Clark and the Nez Perce:

Alexis: If you look here [pointing to the map] the date is September 19<sup>th</sup>, and then they left months later see here [pointing to the enlarged text panel associated with the renderings of canoes] they left October 7<sup>th</sup>.

Joaquin: Yeah, so they spent time with the Indians.

Sam: But it was a long time, a couple of weeks.

Alexis: It wasn't like it was a quick visit. They actually lived with the Nez people. That would mean they ate with them and slept with them.

Sam: It really didn't mean that they tried to, you know, subdue them because they were savages.

Alexis: Like they were taking over the Natives and the Native land?

Sam: They didn't do this here. They did that diplomacy because they needed to live and eat and exist and continue on in the expedition.

This conversation focused on Lewis and Clark and the Corps crossing through the mountainous area of present-day Montana and the developing relationship between Lewis and Clark and Native Indians along the route. Although the Newberry exhibition explicitly showed the refuge Lewis and Clark took with the Nez Perce, the students returned back to their previous conversations. This is noted in the comment by Sam specific to the diplomatic relationship between Lewis and Clark and the Nez Perce. This was also noted in Sam's rephrasing of the World's Fair exhibition sources and how they did not try to subdue the Natives, but instead became dependent on them. The students noted that the Native presence in the expedition was necessary for its success, and that the diplomacy briefly considered at the initial discussions became more prominent in this latter conversation. Immediately following this conversation, the students moved out of the gallery to work directly on their project. One of the key concerns expressed in the conversation was the sense that understanding the exhibition did not mean the abandonment of oppositional narratives about the Lewis and Clark expedition. Here, the notion of the present-day representation of Native Indians in the exhibition confirmed the distinctions between the history of those who are included and those who are not:

Alexis: It's just not another exhibition and collection of artifacts. It is the inclusion of a history that isn't always told.

Joaquin: It is told, probably by the Natives themselves.

Sam: Yeah, but for it to be here, now in this exhibit probably makes people uncomfortable.

Interviewer: How are people uncomfortable?

Sam: Well, you know how people feel about Indians. I bet it is . . .

Joaquin: . . . a challenge for white people.

Sam: Yeah. A hard time for them to understand why they [Native Indians] want their own show . . . and their own history.

The students spoke about the exhibit as being more than just an alternative narrative of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Specifically, they referred to how such a representation of the expedition does not follow the traditional established narrative. In particular, they follow a common claim that various ethnic and racial groups are often ignored from history. Sam infers a larger misunderstanding of why an inclusive history ought to be included when attempting to understand an event such as the Lewis and Clark expedition.

In later conversations with the students following their return to Hampton High, they spoke of the challenges of examining the Lewis and Clark exhibition in light of the current bicentennial celebrations. They spoke primarily about their own changing understandings about the Lewis and Clark expedition that came with the shifting representations:

Joaquin: It makes it difficult to really know what to think about the expedition when you are given all of this other information.

Sam: We have more knowledge now than before.

Joaquin: But what we know before depends on what we know now. I mean, I can go back and read a book about the expedition and know that the representation is for a reason and. . . . You know, it is really specific for specific knowing.

Alexis: It isn't like people don't know about new information. It is just to see how people can. . . line up the different representations and see.

Sam: You see what is important at the time. And you see what is included. And you see what isn't included.

This short conversation distilled the larger problem the students initially faced when examining the relationship between the expedition and U.S. national identity. They all make reference to knowing more about how particular representations are situated temporally and for particular purposes. The students refer to an expanded understanding not only of the expedition, but also of the use of the expedition for purposes beyond solely historical knowledge.

## CONCLUSION

I began this article with the argument that students can develop a sense of historical consciousness. In presenting the student conversations as they studied the Lewis and Clark expedition, I show how they worked through understanding how the expedition remains an event that is firmly entrenched in U.S. history. This examination of student comments and conversations provides an opportunity to see how students do not accept particular narratives without question and how they do consider a historical event within its own historicity. The changing purposes that the expedition served, as embodied at the 1904 World's Fair and the 2004 bicentennial celebrations like the Newberry exhibit, provided an opportunity for the

students to tackle the various representations and historical portrayals of the Lewis and Clark expedition. The students further understood how each representation was a way of making sense of history and the logic of historical interpretation. They realized the poetics and rhetoric that shaped the representations of the past and the possibilities of understanding these representations as significant in present-day reference to national identity. To attempt to unravel how the students engaged with the normalized narratives about the past while, at the same time, addressing issues associated with developing historical consciousness is to encounter a tangle of tensions between the place of historical events in the past, the present, and the future, of which I discuss below.

In this final portion of the article, I return briefly to the general findings that show both the limitations and possibilities of developing historical consciousness. I attempt to shed light on the students' critical examination of the past, because, as Lowenthal (1985) puts it, there remains as an almost universal concern of "how people in general see, value, or understand [the past]" (p. xxvi). This is not an idealist position that denies the actual event occurring, but rather an assertion that an event such as the Lewis and Clark expedition offered the students opportunity to question its affirmed nationalist purpose within a larger contextual framework of historical consciousness. To get a sense that understanding history has not always meant the abandonment of oppositional narratives and representations requires examining how events are presented over time. By studying an event at different points in time offers distinctions between which history is told and which history is not. Few studies have identified the central role that temporality plays in the exceptionality of individuals and events that have established a nation such as the United States. The notion of a singular history, with its corollaries of nationalism and a distinct national identity, is no longer the only way for students to understand the past. As the academic discipline of history critically engages in self-reflexivity of how it has contributed to a singular national identity, so are scholars in education who are critically engaging in examining how students come to understand the past and its relationship to the present.

Certainly, to understand the past one needs to examine past traces. The increased use of primary and secondary source materials in school classrooms is commonly thought to ensure a complementary increase in historical knowledge. Scholars have suggested that learning about the past is a process of critical inquiry that examines evidence left over from the past (notably sources) as an element necessary for the interpretation of complex, varied, and contested narratives (Sandwell, 2005). What has commonly been accepted as fact for secondary students is a coherent narrative interpretation of evidence presented in textbooks (Porat, 2004) and public exhibitions (Trofanenko, 2007) as taken-for-granted factual accounts. By drawing attention to the students' abilities to contrast the representations does not mean students ignore one representation at the expense of the

other. Rather, as shown here, by examining the 1904 World's Fair materials and the 2004 Newberry exhibition, students can attend to the underlying issues specific to each representation. Specifically, the students went beyond considering the expedition solely as past event. Rather, they worked to consider the expedition a vehicle for achieving further understanding about issues of inclusion (and subsequently exclusion) and of racialized identities.

Native historian Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (2004) argues that "complex historical events [of] images and ideas [are reduced] to simple and manageable forms . . . its major intent [to] distort an ugly history in an effort to make it acceptable to the mainstream fantasy" (p. 28). Her comments are relevant to the ways in which the students considered the 1804 expedition. Like Cook-Lynn, these three students were aware of the imagined strength, courage, and goodwill ascribed to Lewis and Clark. Rather than considering the expedition as an unquestionable event with a single representation, the students critiqued the impermeability of interpretation and representation, of the contingency and complexity of historical interpretation. In particular, the inferences made specific to Lewis and Clark reflected their awareness of how Native Indians were represented then and how they continue to be represented now.

Far from solely developing their own historical craft or method, these students engaged in the analysis of the changing role of the Lewis and Clark expedition. In drawing attention to how the students contrasted the representations shows how they challenged each other individually to see the relationship between representations and temporal orientations. The availability of the sources, the opportunity for extensive examination of additional representations, and attending a public exhibition was not an exercise in pedagogical futility, and the students did not see it that way either. Instead, the educational process was essential in recasting their ideas of what it meant to understand an event. It brought with it the notion of intellectual engagement that transcends what is considered middle and high school student ability. The project itself affirmed for the students that history is always open to interpretation and questioning through the process of historical inquiry beyond solely examining source materials. The students realized that the expedition continues to evoke values and traditions within the United States and serves as a conduit between the present and the past. The students understood that the created public identities about Lewis and Clark were founded on the presumption of a set of cultural values that clarify what role historical events that serve a collective historical imagination. These identities were not absolute but served as examples of ascribing personal characteristics gleaned from an event and one's interpretation of that event.

To understand how the expedition, along with other events, remains deeply valued and publicly celebrated within the United States requires reconsidering the reasons why our students should learn about the past.

The long-held claim of necessary factual knowledge as a conduit to increased nationalism and a sense of a national identity holds significant pedagogical implications. We can no longer hope to equip students by teaching them about the past as one coherent story. Nor is the purpose to construct more progressive narratives that arouse interest, involvement, and imagination. While such narratives may be more dramatically convincing, more appealing, or more persuasive than what can be offered in our classrooms and teaching materials, such a critical sensibility ought to address how easily a historical event has been romanticized in the name of nationalism and national identity. As educators, we can effectively marshal a more critical sensibility in our students by rendering that our national identities are frequently constructed by historical events that remain primarily a celebration. To understand the past requires that we have a vigilant concern with the present.

Although Rösen (1989) firmly argues that historical consciousness follows closely to the historical writing in the tradition of Hayden White (1975), he further believes students need to be competent in knowing the narrative structure. Shemilt (2000) has hesitantly suggested that students' ability to engage with history is influenced by their inability to understand how to "handle the past as a whole" (p. 86). As he further notes what results are students who are "able to map the past; even fewer can offer a coherent narrative; and virtually none can conceive of anything more subtle than a single 'best' narrative" (p. 86). He argues for a "polythetic narrative framework" to recognize that narratives are "interpretations whose epistemological status differs from the facts incorporated into them" (p. 87). This means that students ought to study not only the facts and the employment of these facts into narratives, but also to understand what has become the "single 'best' narrative" and how one or another narrative is prominent at different times. The students studied the expedition at three separate times and reinterpreted the expedition's significance to the nation's past in terms of contemporary values, issues, and concerns. Understanding the past rests on students' selective reading of the texts that define the past *at a particular point in time*.

In suggesting that history is the myth of the west, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1995) puts forward an idea that history tends to create ideal constructions, usually of a national past in the form of heroism and patriotism. While the expedition itself did not qualify as a success initially, by the turn of the last century the Lewis and Clark expedition was "reborn" as U.S. icons "to represent triumphant American nationalism (Ronda, 2001, p. 124). What has occurred in the past is often simplified through the construction of myths as opposed to a critical sensibility of this construction. The tension facing students in distinguishing between the purposes an event held in the past and in the present is not just a question of providing alternative source materials related to alternative narratives. The development of a historical consciousness turns on the students'

ability to move beyond the branded history of the U.S. exceptionalism for the purposes of nation building, nationalism, and a collective national identity to begin to question how the expedition intersected with the production of identities.

I do not wish to suggest that the success in developing students' historical consciousness is as simple as providing longer commitment to time to engage with more and varied sources. Such a suggestion is too simplistic. Similarly, presenting conflicting images and tropes garnered from archival sources without questioning the use of such resources results in reflecting on the past with nostalgia that continues to celebrate such history. To move beyond a unitary grand narrative of the past such a conceptualization requires a critical recognition that any historical event is capable of generating multiple meanings through the interaction of their persistence images with collective national identities in other times and at other places. This has pedagogical implications for what we consider the instruction of a history curriculum. Perhaps educators can move beyond teaching solely to garner facts from source documents. Instead, educators can move toward understanding how common themes may be buried in historical events that need to be uncovered to explicate the relationship between the past and the present. In developing an awareness of any interconnection needs to make explicit the rights of students to be encouraged to delve deeply into the messiness of history, and our responsibilities as educators to be responsible for pedagogically engaging learning activities. I suggest that the truly exciting potential of demystifying the relationship between the past and the present and the interconnectedness between these two elements needs to occur in our history classrooms. With such an awareness and preparation, students can realize how the perspective of the past continues to hold firm in their present.

## NOTES

1. In 1803, the acquisition of 828,000 square miles of French territory by the U.S. government (which came to be known as the Louisiana Purchase) sparked interest in expansion to and exploration of the west coast. Shortly after the purchase, President Thomas Jefferson had Congress appropriate \$2,500 for an expedition. The exploration of the Pacific Northwest coast was intended to study the Native tribes, botany, geology, the western terrain and wildlife, as well as evaluate the potential interference of British and French Canadian hunters and trappers who were already established in the area. President Jefferson selected Captain Meriwether Lewis to lead the expedition, which was soon known as the Corps of Discovery. Lewis, William Clark, and 40 expedition members were charged with initiating and completing this overland expedition to the Pacific Northwest. The completion of the expedition in 1806 warranted several achievements, notably extensive knowledge of western geography, description of plants and animal species, established a precedent for Army exploration of the west, strengthened U.S. claims to the Oregon Territory, and produced a large body of literature about the west through the Lewis and Clark diaries.



2. The exhibition consisted of four sections including (1) The Indian Country in 1800, which set the context for the exhibition; (2) Crossing the Indian Country, which focused specifically on the Lewis and Clark expedition; (3) A New Nation Comes to the Indian Country, which describes the experience of the five featured Indian communities in the wake of the exhibition; and (4) The Indian Country Today, which focused on the five communities and their contemporary efforts to protect and preserve their native cultures. The six subsections within Crossing the Indian Country were differentiated by chronology: November 1804 to April 1805—Winter with the Mandans and Hidatsas; September 1805—Meeting with the Salish and acquiring horses on the trip over the Lobo Trail; September 1805—Rescued by the Nez Perce; Winter 1805 to 1806—On the Pacific coast and rising tensions with Indians; April 1806—celebrations and meetings with Umatillas as the expedition heads east; and July 1806—Encounter with Blackfeet turns violent, Lewis shoots Indians. Further information about the exhibit is available at [www.newberry.org/](http://www.newberry.org/).

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