
Social Studies, Citizenship Education, and the Search for an American Identity: An Argument against a Unifying Narrative

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One of the more haunting images from George Orwell's (1949) *1984* is that of the protagonist, Winston Smith, altering official government history on behalf of the Party as part of his responsibilities at the Ministry of Truth. Orwell viewed the mandating of a singular, unquestionable historical record detestable enough to include within a cautionary tale of unabated totalitarianism, yet students in public schools across the United States are continually being exposed to a singular national narrative within their social studies classrooms. This narrative does not necessarily come from a formal plan of indoctrination, but from tradition and the belief that schools have a responsibility to promote a unified message of what it means to be an American citizen.

Political scientists have long associated educational attainment with increased democratic participation, namely acts of voting and social capital (Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996; Putnam, 2000; Tenn, 2005), prompting Galston (2001) to assert that "all education is civic education" (p. 219). Despite such claims, social studies educators often assume responsibility for the development of civic skills and dispositions, and research suggests that the more exposure students have with social studies curricula the more likely they are to develop traits of responsible citizens (Nie & Hillygus, 2001). However, few studies have attempted to discern the link between social studies education and students' conceptions of themselves as American citizens.

For the majority of students in the United States, their primary instruction on "what it means to be an American" emanates from the

traditional narrative of American history and democracy that is presented in the classroom. In this sense, schools are aiding in the construction of what Bourdieu (1977/2008) describes as *habitus*, or “a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a *matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions*” (p. 438; emphasis in original). Bourdieu further explains this notion of habitus as “the product of the work of inculcation and appropriation necessary in order for those products of collective history, the objective structures to succeed in reproducing themselves more or less completely, in the form of durable dispositions” (p. 440). In other words, the traditional canon acts as a unifying force that institutes a common way of viewing the world. Schools, central to Dewey’s (1916) conception of society as a “mode of associated living” (p. 87), play an integral role in perpetuating this ethos to future generations. These lessons, along with influences from family and popular culture, create both a collective memory and American identity (Wineburg et al., 2007).

Yet, is the traditional American narrative the most appropriate means by which to develop a true sense of American history and citizenship? Viewing citizenship as a type of social space in which “knowledge, meanings, and identities are discursively shaped” (Pinson, 2007, p. 354), I argue that a more representative ethos is that of multiple narratives, which highlight the pluralistic nature of American history and society. It is my contention that competing narratives actually have the potential to act as greater unifying agents than assimilating behind one agreed upon version of American history and society. In this article, I first look at the current state of citizenship education in the United States before presenting an argument for diverse classroom instruction that treats American history and citizenship as fluid ideas rather than as a fixed national narrative.

The Current State of Citizenship Education in the United States

At a recent meeting of the National Council for Social Studies, a prominent scholar, acting as a discussant for papers on state standards, described citizenship education as a “sinkhole” that continues to engulf social studies educators. The comparison seems apt considering that the arguments being waged over civic education and history instruction today are reminiscent of those held at the beginning of the 20th century (Bohan, 2003; Watras, 2002). Part of the problem remains the fact that the United States lacks a definitive national ethos, particularly when compared to other nations throughout the world.

For a stark comparison, consider the ideological clashes that occur

in Israel over history education and national identity. The long and tortured history of the Jewish people, marred by exile, oppression, and genocide, unites them behind a story of Zionist pride that makes impossible the construction of a neutral narrative including a similar story of Palestinian displacement (Hofman, 2007; Hofman et al., 2007). This ideological polarization creates a political battleground for textbook adoption and curriculum development (Al-Haj, 2005; Gordon, 2005; Pinson, 2007). For most Americans, such fervor over the inclusion or exclusion of views within the history curriculum may seem irrelevant or even alarming, yet for Israeli Jews and Palestinians it remains a salient endeavor, for as Ahonen (2001) states, "Narratives become objects of collective identification" (p. 179).

Despite the efforts of politicians and members of the media to persuade voters otherwise (Journell, 2011), American society is pluralistic rather than polarized, although that has not always been the case. Near the end of the 19th century, W. E. B. Du Bois (1897/2008) expressed concern over Americans' willingness to accept cultural diversity when he asked, "Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both? Or is it my duty to cease to be a Negro as soon as possible and be an American?" (p. 146). Similarly, fear of communism and fascism created temporary polarization, even within public education, during the middle part of the twentieth century (Burdette, 1942; Burks, 1907; Ellwood, 1920). More recently, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, briefly forced citizens to align emotionally and politically as President Bush famously declared, "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists" (Bush, 2001). Although the statement was aimed at nations harboring terrorists, the underlying message of unity was clear. However, instances of severe polarization in American history occur few and far between, and when they do occur, the effects are often temporary. Despite differences in gender, race, class, religion, and orientation, Americans today tend to agree more often than they disagree, yet the pluralistic nature of American society fundamentally hinders the development of a shared national narrative.

While American society continues to be defined by increased pluralism, social studies education in the United States has not only remained ideologically stagnant, but it has also become less diverse due to curriculum standardization efforts of states and the federal government. The past 20 years have been characterized by the belief that students do not know basic information about American history, a perception buoyed by poor student performances on standardized assessments (Ravitch & Finn, 1987). When combined with the current neoliberal conception of education imposed on public schools in the United States (Hursh, 2007), this emphasis on historical knowledge has created renewed interest in

the traditional, non-critical approach to American history to the point where it has become the most utilized discourse in democratic education (Miller-Lane et al., 2007).

Abowitz and Harnish (2006) label this view of citizenship “civic republicanism”¹ (p. 657) and characterize it by devotion to civic duty, patriotism, and knowledge of democratic processes, combined with a basic understanding of traditional moral values (Damon, 2001; Holmes, 2001). Although adherents of civic republicanism acknowledge diversity, they feel that national economic and societal concerns should supersede ethnic or global issues (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006; Ravitch, 2006). As a result, knowledge of American history is of utmost importance in a civic republican curriculum, with hopes that exposure to the traditional American narrative promotes unity and pride in our democratic society (Damon, 2001).

When elements of injustice and oppression occur within the traditional narrative, a civic republican curriculum includes them as examples of the self-correcting nature of American democracy. In other words, the Constitutional clause labeling slaves as 3/5 of a White person is less important than the adoption of the Civil Rights Amendments nearly a century later (Miller-Lane et al., 2007). Such lessons can also be used to accentuate the moral component related to civic republicanism by weighing ethical issues and reinforcing the importance of being free and equal citizens in a democracy (Farr Darling, 2002, 2006).

Finally, civic republicanism serves a utilitarian function as part of the vision for education often espoused by our elected leaders (Carpenter, 2005). There exists a widespread belief that the purpose of social studies instruction is to prepare students for life in a democracy, and civic republicans take this to mean equipping students with knowledge of laws, civic responsibility, and market economies (Patrick, 2006). Perhaps this emphasis explains why studies of students’ perceptions of citizenship show that students value tangible aspects of citizenship, such as voting, obeying laws, and helping others, rather than notions of what it means to be an American citizen (Chiodo & Martin, 2005; Hickey, 2002; Martin & Chiodo, 2007; Torney-Purta, 2002).

Liberal Citizenship Education

The antithesis to civic republicanism is what Abowitz and Harnish (2006) broadly term liberal citizenship discourses.² While liberal citizenship comes in a variety of forms, they all deviate from traditional social studies instruction (Ross, 2000) by viewing American history and society through a critical lens that acknowledges social diversity. For example,

a study of the Bill of Rights in a non-critical, civic republican setting would examine the amendments, explain their historical significance, and tell the story of their ratification. In contrast, a liberal approach to the same issue would start similarly but may expand into discussions of the specific conditions under which the amendments were written and analyze which groups, if any, were excluded and for what reason (Miller-Lane et al., 2007).

Liberal citizenship also admonishes the nationalistic leanings of civic republicanism. Ben Porath (2003) argues that an overtly patriotic curriculum can lead to what he calls “belligerent citizenship” (p. 245), which is characterized by undesirable side effects, such as alienation of minority groups, particularly during times of war or national crisis. He argues that liberal citizenship education reduces the potentially harmful effects of belligerent citizenship by opening lines of communication and promoting tolerance.

The idea of increased communication, or deliberation, rests at the center of liberal conceptions of citizenship and can be tied to Habermas’s Theory of Communicative Action (1981/1984, 1981/1987) which states that language is the primary medium for coordinating action among individuals (White, 1988). Proponents of deliberative democracy view the purpose of education as developing the skills necessary for citizens to become capable of critically evaluating the actions of their government and society (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). Deliberation within an educational context consists of providing students with a wide range of ideas in order for them to successfully adapt into a diverse and ever-changing society (Gutmann, 1987). An ideal social studies classroom for a proponent of liberal citizenship would have students debating the merits of American democracy and developing a sense of historical interpretation. However, the fixed nature of textbooks and state curricula, coupled with the demands of high-stakes testing, have stifled the amount and quality of discussion that occurs in social studies classrooms (Parker, 2006).

Deliberation concerns those advocating a civic republican discourse because they see increased attention to diversity and the questioning of traditional social studies as destroying the common narrative that binds society together (Miller-Lane et al., 2007). However, Westheimer (2006) argues that questioning the status quo does not dilute patriotism; rather, he describes “democratic patriotism” (p. 611) as pledging allegiance not to a false sense of nationalism, but to the principles that underlie American democracy. These principles include questioning authority, deliberating ideas, and challenging the actions of elected leaders. For Westheimer, the greatest action of any citizen in a democracy is the willingness to look critically at one’s surroundings and challenge preexisting beliefs,

which for secondary students would include the traditional canon of American history.

Recent research in political science has uncovered a potential dark side to deliberation, however, particularly when linked to traditional forms of civic participation. According to Mutz (2006) and Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002), increased exposure to contradictory beliefs creates feelings of ambivalence, which has a tendency to reduce active participation and foster attitudes of disinterest towards politics. In other words, groups of ideologically homogeneous individuals are more likely to rally around a common cause while ideologically heterogeneous groups are more likely to consider alternative points of view and act cautiously, if at all. However, Walsh (2004) warns that, while it may be easier for homogeneous groups to develop a collective identity, the end result is often polarizing and unwelcoming of divergent beliefs. Therefore, a positive side effect of deliberation is that increased exposure to heterogeneous beliefs fosters feelings of tolerance for diverse opinions and groups (Mutz, 2006).

For political scientists concerned with voter turnout, such news is alarming. However, for social studies educators charged with developing citizens for a pluralistic society, the development of tolerance is essential. According to Gutmann (2004), tolerating cultural differences is a democratic value, and teaching about diversity and exposing students to alternative historical narratives promote a better understanding of unfamiliar groups as civic equals. Moreover, she argues that knowledge of cultural differences, both historical and contemporary, aids students' understandings of society as a whole. However, Gutmann does distinguish between culturally specific and culturally neutral values and argues that individuals in a democracy should tolerate cultural practices that may offend, but do not violate the civic equality of free persons.

Liberal social studies education, as described above, is hardly a new concept within American educational thought. A quick perusal of academic literature on social studies education will no doubt find numerous scholars touting the merits of diversity and inclusion within the study of history while simultaneously railing against the exclusionary tenets of civic republicanism. It is widely accepted within academic circles that teaching social studies from a diverse perspective that critically questions traditional notions of history is beneficial for the civic development of all students due to the increased empathy and cultural understanding that is achieved from doing so (Banks, 1990; Barton & Levstik, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Ogbu, 1992; Wills, 1996). Even as early as the turn of the previous century, Dewey (1909) argued for the teaching of history from a sociological standpoint, stating that "the ethical value of

history teaching will be measured by the extent to which past events are made the means of understanding the present” (p. 36).

Why, then, are social studies classrooms throughout the United States still clinging to archaic forms of history education that retell the same patriotic, Eurocentric narrative that has been taught since the nation’s founding? Unfortunately, there is no one definitive answer to this question. Certainly, as Apple (1979) notes, the ideological backgrounds of those who construct the formal curriculum play a considerable role in shaping the curricular message, which in the United States are predominantly those of privileged, White males. However, the desire for a unified national narrative cannot be understated. Many Americans from both sides of the political spectrum still believe that the traditional story of U.S. history, one of an infallible nation that overcame considerable odds to become the last great superpower, should be taught as a tie that binds Americans from all walks of life.

However, that traditional narrative does not speak for a large percentage of those currently living in the United States, nor does it adequately prepare students to live in a society characterized by increased diversity, immigration, and pluralism. In the remainder of this article, I argue that the most appropriate national narrative for the United States is one of multiple narratives followed by a discussion of how best to initiate widespread implementation of liberal citizenship discourses in public schools across the United States.

Toward a New American Narrative

Social studies education sits at a crossroads with respect to citizenship education in the United States. At one end of the spectrum is the traditional narrative advocated by civic republicanism; at the other end is a liberal discourse that embraces diverse cultures, ideas, and beliefs. Both have potential as unifying agents, and the choice comes down to personal ideology. I feel that civic republicanism has the inclination to assimilate, not unify, thereby creating the potential for an Orwellian state, or at the very least, the polarizing effects of belligerent citizenship (Ben Porath, 2003). While Israeli Jews and Palestinians may have developed solid cultural identities, few would argue that the relationship between the two groups is a healthy one. Narratives must be fluid and open to differing interpretations. The goal of civic republicanism to develop a single national narrative creates a setting for conflict, for as Gordon (2005) states, “If two ethnic narratives truly contradict each other, then it is impossible for a person who upholds one of the narratives to see the other narrative as legitimate” (p. 371).

Therefore, a liberal citizenship discourse seems more appropriate for a pluralistic society, since a liberal approach advocates inclusion rather than exclusion (Metzger, 2002). Research within social studies education has shown that many groups within American society often do not feel the traditional narrative speaks to them, resulting in adverse attitudes toward both education and society (Cooks & Epstein, 2000; Epstein, 1998; 2000; Forbes, 2000). Returning to Du Bois (1897/2008), who states, “The history of the world is the history, not of individuals, but of groups” (p. 144), social studies educators should frame their instruction as exposing their students to competing American narratives. Instead of teaching a course on American history, a more appropriate title for that course might be a study of the multiple histories of the United States. Such framing does not devalue the traditional narrative, but enlightens students to the fact that no true history exists, that all historical events are open to interpretation (Lee, 2004).

The question then becomes whether inclusion of multiple narratives can establish a *habitus*, or a particular unifying ethos for the United States. Proponents of civic republicanism would argue that an agreed upon, traditional narrative defends against the dangers of factions, yet I would argue that identity is more salient to the well-being of a nation than unity. If segments of the population never see themselves as part of the larger scope of a nation’s history and society, then there exists little chance of full unity, no matter how strong the push. Moreover, Coser (1956/2008) argues that disagreements among heterogeneous groups may actually strengthen relationships and produce associations that reduce feelings of social isolation. Therefore, if the national narrative for the United States is one of multiple narratives, then so be it. An identity of inclusion and deliberation would serve as a noble American legacy.

Before moving to a discussion on how to implement a widespread vision of liberal citizenship education, it seems prudent to question whether such a goal is reasonable or desirable for educators to pursue. For an answer I defer to Counts (1932), who argues that “complete impartiality is utterly impossible, that the school must shape attitudes, develop tastes, and even impose ideas” (p. 19). Counts believes that schools hold a unique position in society and that teachers have a social responsibility to advocate a particular social order. He would argue that social studies educators should “deliberately reach for power” (p. 28) and institute a change in the way our students look at American history and society. Such a transformation cannot occur overnight, however. Rather, numerous changes need to be implemented in teacher education and classroom instruction.

Implementing Widespread Change

Educating Teachers

Moving to a liberal conception of citizenship within social studies education presents a formidable challenge due to the ubiquitous nature of traditional social studies instruction (Ross, 2000). The traditional narrative is both generational and perpetual. Teachers expose their students to the textbook version of history in part because the story is familiar. As a result, subsequent generations of teachers enter teacher education programs armed only with this limited knowledge of American history and society. If they are never exposed to counter narratives, then they will, in turn, never expose their future students to alternative interpretations of history. In a recent study of a predominantly White, suburban high school, de Waal Lucas (2007) found that the social studies educators did not view multiculturalism as salient to the curriculum because the majority of their students were White. After further prodding, de Waal Lucas found that many of the teachers also chose not to include multicultural elements within their instruction because they did not feel competent with non-traditional versions of history.

Perhaps a more harrowing example of the need for renewed emphasis on cultural diversity in teacher education can be seen in Writer's (2001) study of her own educational diversity course. Writer asked her students what words came to mind when they pictured American Indians. The student responses included such items as *dark skin, feathers, moccasins, teepees, and scalped White people*. These answers reflect the influence the traditional narrative and popular culture have on students, and no one should expect our future educators to become instantly enlightened once they walk onto a university campus. Moreover, as Wills (1996) notes, exposure to a multicultural education is beneficial for all students, not just students of color. Therefore, subject area courses in educational diversity should be mandated for all teacher education programs, and courses in social studies methods should center on critiquing traditional versions of history by looking at them through a critical lens (Giroux & McLaren, 1986).

Teacher educators also have a responsibility to provide pre-service teachers with resources that allow for exploration of non-traditional historical narratives. Again, many students may enter teacher education programs with limited exposure to historical education that goes beyond using textbooks as the sole source of information. As Apple (1992) has argued, textbooks reflect a particular ideology, usually that of the publisher and those to whom the text is being marketed, which, in the United States, is often policymakers from the most populated states.

Thus, relying solely on commercial textbooks for course information and class assignments, as many novice teachers are prone to do, does little to move conversations beyond the traditional narrative. The Internet, in particular, offers educators a breadth and depth of knowledge that far surpasses anything they will find in a textbook, ranging from digitized primary sources to personal testimonies, all of which can aid students in constructing multiple narratives (Journell, 2009b)

However, even when teachers are exposed to engaging and interactive resources, many fail to recognize their potential for historical understanding, ultimately turning Internet resources and primary sources into high-tech textbooks (Tally, 2007). Therefore, a basic understanding of historiography is likely needed to enact liberal citizenship education. In order for teachers to challenge the traditional narrative, they have to view their textbook and other sources as historical interpretations and not as irrefutable fact. In other words, pre-service teachers need training in the skills of historical inquiry as part of their teacher education programs.

Thinking historically means approaching history as a search for evidence, not as a completed story ready to be learned. However, historical thinking is not innate (Wineburg, 2001). In a study involving the reading of historical texts, Wineburg (1991) found that historians often take sophisticated approaches to analyzing texts when compared to secondary teachers and students. Historians view primary sources as interpretive puzzle pieces that aid in painting a more complete picture of the unknown. Non-historians, on the other hand, tend to view primary sources as incontestable fact, even when presented with additional sources that present contradictory information, and tend to believe that one text can sufficiently explain the entirety of a historical event.

Being able to think historically is essential for critiquing the traditional canon as well as accurately exploring diverse narratives. Since the Eurocentric historical model is widely accepted in American culture, students may be skeptical of competing narratives. Effective use of historical evidence in the classroom would force students to start questioning their sense of history, which has been shaped by media, their families, and previous formal instruction (Wineburg et al., 2007). However, students can learn to interpret and evaluate historical sources only if their teachers are well-versed in those skills.

Finally, teachers with an understanding of historical thinking will most likely organize their classroom instruction differently than those who view history as dissemination of factual knowledge. A classroom based on inquiry allows for a constructivist model of teaching where teachers act as coordinators of information, while students have the freedom to

explore and interpret history for themselves (Gergen, 1995). As students begin to view history as an active process rather than a static discipline, teachers will have greater opportunities to break from the traditional canon and encourage their students to consider alternative narratives.

Resistance to Standards

For nearly three decades, public education in the United States has operated under a neoliberal philosophy that emphasizes production and accountability (Hursh, 2007). Particularly since the passage of the No Child Left Behind legislation in 2001, state curriculum standards, especially those backed by high-stakes tests, have strongly influenced the information being taught in public school classrooms. Research on social studies instruction in high-stakes testing environments have found that mandated state standards do not necessarily affect teachers' instructional methods, but they do seem to play a role in determining what content is important enough to be covered (Grant, 2001; Segall, 2003; van Hover, 2006; Vogler, 2005).

For many young teachers entering the profession, pressure to achieve high student pass rates on state assessments has forced them to streamline their instruction to the point that they are only covering information found in curriculum standards. I have taught a variety of secondary social studies methods courses in my career, and whenever I encourage students to try a new teaching strategy or break from the traditional narrative at least one student invariably questions how he or she could possibly spend time on non-required information given the copious amount of facts required by the state. This type of mentality, coupled with the state and federal sanctions placed upon underachieving schools, has cast a pall over what should be a vibrant and engaging subject.

Of course, strict adherence to curriculum standards is problematic for liberal citizenship because standards, like textbooks, tend to reinforce the views of those in power, often White males who identify with the traditional narrative (Apple, 1979, 2007). Content analyses of state standards has shown that states overwhelmingly stick to traditional notions of American history, and elements of diversity are either marginalized or omitted entirely (Journell 2008, 2009a, 2009c; Crocco, 2004). If recent history is any indication, implementation of state social studies standards in the United States will continue to stifle efforts to diversify the curriculum. Studies have shown that policymakers often use their authority to impose standards that reflect their view of history while simultaneously refusing to give opposing viewpoints a seat at the table (Barbour et al., 2007; Fore, 1998; Placier et al., 2002).

Although it seems doubtful that educational policy in the United

States will change any time soon, educators can change the way they respond to the pressures that come with curriculum standards. Teacher educators must do a better job of reminding pre-service teachers that state standards only represent a basic set of knowledge that students are expected to learn. Instead of repeatedly drilling the same facts into their students' heads, teachers should attempt to make the required curriculum meaningful by having students critically analyze the traditional narrative. Moreover, a liberal conception of citizenship is truly effective only if students have knowledge of the traditional curriculum from which to compare. Therefore, enacting a liberal approach to American history in the classroom should not only diversify the historical message being presented, but also satisfy teachers' professional responsibility to the state.

For many teachers mired in a high-stakes testing environment, such a proposition is daunting, especially if left in the abstract. Fortunately, recent scholarship has attempted to provide teachers with practical solutions for diversifying their curriculum in this age of accountability (e.g., Bolgatz, 2006; Fickel, 2006; Gradwell, 2006). For example, instead of abandoning the textbook completely, Loewen (2010) argues that teachers should have their students deconstruct their textbooks in light of contradictory historical evidence found through primary and other secondary sources. He then suggests teachers have their students rewrite sections of their textbooks or send letters to the publishers outlining the deficiencies in the texts. These types of activities not only act as a compromise between teaching for ideological diversity and the traditional canon required by state curricula, but they also represent a type of ambitious history instruction that forces students to engage in the process of historical thinking.

Unfortunately, the problem with standards is as much perception as it is reality. Reducing teachers' fear of standards and high-stakes assessments will not happen easily or quickly. However, if teachers can be convinced that they can create meaningful and diverse instruction in spite of state standards, it will go a long way toward encouraging students to accept multiple narratives as a way of defining American history.

Creating Public Spaces in the Classroom

The last stage in implementing a widespread liberal approach to history education in the United States requires turning our attention from *what* is being taught to *how* history is being taught in public schools. Too often teachers approach classroom instruction as a one-sided activity. The teacher teaches, and the students learn. While there are benefits to this approach, namely classroom management, it creates an environment for poor history education.

As noted earlier, liberal history education requires students learn and practice skills of historians, namely evaluation and interpretation. However, those skills are most effective when students can share and analyze historical information with their peers. This type of collaboration creates an environment for deliberation, which is essential to exposing students to diverse narratives in a way that they can accept and understand.

However, facilitating quality classroom discussions is no easy task, even for experienced teachers (Parker & Hess, 2002). In order to create an environment that is suitable for deliberation teachers must view their classrooms as a type of public spheres, which, according to Habermas, allow for “intersubjective relations on the basis of reciprocal recognition and the use of communicative freedom, that is, spontaneous positions for-or-against regarding themes, reasons, and information” (Carleheden & Gabriels, 1996, p. 8). Such classrooms would allow for evidence-based discussions of beliefs, foster tolerance for diverse opinions, and create opportunities for students to challenge traditional viewpoints (Englund, 2006). However, teachers can only achieve open classrooms if they are willing to relinquish some of their natural authority as gatekeepers of information (Thornton, 1991) and revise their role to that of a moderator or facilitator (Gergen, 1995).

Deliberative instruction also allows teachers to take advantage of the diversity inherently found in many public schools. Students enter classrooms with their own histories, and many of their experiences may contradict the narrative they find in their textbook or state curriculum standards. The opportunity to engage with diverse narratives can be found in almost every history classroom in the United States, but teachers can only benefit from them if they allow their classrooms to be open to discussion, interpretation, and criticism (Bernhardt, 2009).

Perhaps the greatest benefit of deliberation is that students are allowed to experience the pluralism that they will encounter as American citizens. Being exposed to diverse historical narratives is an important step in acclimating students to diverse ideologies, but they must also learn how to communicate with others, even those with whom they disagree (Gutmann, 1987). A classroom that allows for the public sharing of opinions and beliefs creates opportunities for students to engage in civil conversations, an art that students may not practice at home and rarely see modeled on television. Finally, deliberation fosters tolerance, which may be the most important lesson needed to live in a pluralistic society in which multiple historical narratives are widely accepted as part of popular culture.

Conclusion

In his seminal work, *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (1916) argues that public education holds a unique and powerful position in American society as a rite of passage that nearly all Americans undertake as they transition from children to adults. Educators have the responsibility of shaping the message learned during these formative years, and social studies educators, in particular, must decide on the type of identity that our citizenry should possess. I have argued in this article that a unified narrative using the same civic republican ideals that have defined history education in the United States for centuries not only creates a grossly inaccurate picture of American history, but also does little to prepare students to enter a diverse, pluralistic society. However, traditions and familiar narratives are difficult to change, especially when internal power structures perpetuate stereotypes and historical inaccuracies. Yet, as liberal conceptions of civic education continue to compete for relevance within the social studies curriculum, I believe there is hope that the traditional canon can be adapted to reflect the changing demographics and culture that make the United States one of the most remarkable nations in the world.

Notes

¹ Others use different labels to address this type of civic stance in social studies education. For example, Banks (1993) prefers the term “Western traditionalism.”

² As one anonymous reviewer astutely noted, labeling civic discourses as either “civic republican” or “liberal” suggests a type of polarization when, in fact, civic discourses are rarely this identifiable or dichotomous. While I use this framework to illustrate the philosophical differences among various types of civic discourses, in practice it is useful, and more accurate, to conceptualize civic discourses as a type of sliding scale that is rarely tipped completely to one side. The point I am trying to convey in this article is that history curricula in the United States too often resides predominately on the civic republican end of the spectrum and a greater emphasis should be placed on liberal discourses for balance.

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