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Thank you for the opportunity to address the future of the National Mall, a place that is near and dear to me as a native Washingtonian and in my role as a history educator for practicing classroom teachers.

I will elaborate on four points in this testimony: the importance of teaching history; the challenges facing contemporary history and social studies classroom teachers; the value of historic sites and memorials; and the urgent need for informed interpretation of historic sites and memorials.

The Importance Of Teaching History

We are all here today because we believe in the importance of teaching history, as a way of reflecting on our collective past, as a way of understanding where we are today and how we got here, and as a springboard for entering our collective future. While few would argue the value of teaching history, there is considerable debate about what it means to teach history well. For the sake of today’s discussion, let us posit that good history instruction helps the learner to feel connected to the story being told and to understand the significance of continuing to tell the story many years after the fact.

One method of offering this kind of instruction is by engaging in historical thinking. The current scholarship on historical thinking identifies five core components to evaluating historical meaning, including multiple accounts and perspectives, analysis of primary documents, sourcing, understanding historical context, and establishing claim-evidence connections (Historical Thinking Matters, 2011; Martin, 2011; National Center for History in the Schools, 2011). In addition, critical scholars suggest that it is important for students to understand that history is not set in concrete but rather is an evolving understanding of the past that includes their own histories and that necessarily engages them in the practice of changing the world (Aguilar, 2010; Freire, 1970/2000). What this means for history and social studies teachers is to share with students their passion and knowledge of the subject matter through lengthy immersion and exploration, perspective taking, informed debate, and hard questioning.

Contemporary History and Social Studies Classroom Teachers

Contemporary history and social studies classroom teachers face considerable challenges in providing opportunities for students to engage in any kind of meaningful historical thinking.

Among history teachers in the U.S., few have learned much history content and fewer than half majored or minored in history in college (Ravitch, 2000; Finn, in Ravitch, 2004). U.S. teachers express poor perceptions and behaviors in teaching American history, particularly when it comes to teaching students to read and understand subtext, and to understand cultural assumptions and moral ambiguity (Liu, Warren & Cowart, 2006). A 2000 study by Levstik indicates that teachers and teacher candidates, particularly those who are “white,” are often more reluctant to teach “negative” histories than are their students to learn about the complexities of the past,

particularly students of color who identify personally with an unsanitized, multicultural view of history (Epstein, 2009; Levstik, 2000). Teachers expressed a preference for upholding the silences and the politeness of imperfect curricula and non-combative classrooms (Levstik, 2000, p. 297). Teachers belonging to social or racial groups that differ from their students face the challenge of being sufficiently self-reflective about their own positionality to effectively reach/teach students in the teaching of multicultural histories (Gruber, 2006). Yet, Cess-Newsome (2002) and Palardy & Rumberger (2008) are among the researchers that demonstrate that regardless of race or class, a teacher's background impacts instruction. In pre-service, certification, and in-service professional development programs, it is possible for teachers to learn methods of subject matter instruction that augment their own histories and background.

However, most pre-service teachers take history methods courses that either fail to address the instructional purposes of history education (Barton & Levstik, 2004), or fail to merge effectively the history discipline with the teaching methods offered in schools of education (McDiarmid & Vinten-Johansen, 2000; Hall & Scott, 2007), or both (Van Sledright, 2011). In addition, pre-service teachers' understanding of history, and their use of the lessons from history, is limited by the range of materials, perspectives, and critical thinking tools at their disposal (Van Sledright, 1995; Edmonds, Hull, Janik & Rylance, 2005; Maestri, 2006). Most college students, including history majors, are exposed to teaching methods that fail to utilize what is known about how best to teach history; generally they have received poor instruction from their K-12 teachers, as well as from their university instructors (Ragland, 2007; Waters, 2005).

For most in-service classroom teachers the goal of promoting historical understanding and thinking historically is severely constrained by professional training, time and insight (Morton, 2000). Once in the classroom, history instruction suffers from poor teacher preparation (Stearns, Seixas & Wineburg, 2000) biased or poorly written textbooks (Ravitch, 2004; Ravitch, 2003; Apple, 2000), and a pedagogy that is driven as much by the demands of principals for an orderly school setting as by the desires of academic historians (Brophy & Van Sledright, 1997). In addition, classroom teachers often feel restricted by standardized tests believing that they are forbidden to teach multiple perspectives or that their students' achievement will suffer from a broader or more complex historical understanding.

The "stories" contained within the teaching and learning of history are often highly contested (for example, Biggers, 2012; Cooper, 2010; FoxNews.com), poorly learned (for example, Gaudelli, 2002), and poorly taught (for example, De La Paz, Malkus, Monte-Sano, & Montanaro, 2011; Van Sledright, 2011; Van Hover, 2008;). In the presence of high-stakes standardized tests for the dominant subjects of language arts and mathematics, and in the absence of strong professional development and community support for the development of historical thinking (Barton, 2008; Levstik & Barton, 2008), P-12 classroom history and social studies teachers – particularly in public schools -- typically use materials and methods that are familiar and approved.

Strong professional development would help classroom teachers overcome these challenges. However, finding appropriate professional development experiences is particularly problematic for teachers of history and social studies. From 1986 to 2001, an annual national assessment of student achievement in history consistently revealed that U.S. students lacked the ability to recall

basic historical facts or to demonstrate higher order historical thinking. In response, the U.S. Department of Education created the Teaching American History (TAH) program to improve teacher content knowledge of and instructional strategies for U.S. history. A 2005 evaluation of the program revealed that most of the US Department of Education Teaching American History projects were located in school districts serving large numbers of students of color, those with limited English proficiency, and students from low-income families. While many of the participating TAH teachers had post-secondary degrees in history, as opposed to the majority of history teachers who are most in need of professional development, even they demonstrated weak skills in historical analysis and interpretation. (Humphrey, Chang-Ross, Donnelly, Hersh, & Skolnik, 2005). With the recent failure to fund TAH grants in the 2012 federal budget, there will be even fewer opportunities for history and social studies teachers to deepen their practice.

These are the realities under which teachers work. Prescriptive teaching practices are enforced in diverse ways in different localities, but dampen teachers' individual approaches to the classroom and innovative teaching content and methods. Nevertheless, teachers within the existing context can offer their students age-appropriate ways to interrogate collective memory, and investigate the various truths contained within multiple historical narratives. One method for doing so is through field studies using historic sites, memorials, and monuments as primary sources. The National Mall – with its wealth of memorials, monuments, museums, and historic sites - is considered the gold standard against which all other public lands are measured, welcoming over 24 million visitors from around the world each year (National Park Service, <http://www.nps.gov/mall/faqs.htm>). But, to what extent does the Mall offer explicit instructional value to classroom students and teachers? Is it sufficient to bus 8th grade students 800 miles to stand at the base of a monument and say, “Kids, this is important because it is here?”

The Educational Value of Historic Sites and Memorials

All public sites of history are interpreted in some way by the entities that elect to preserve them (Young 1993). Memorials are different from the childhood home of an historic figure or a battlefield, because they tend to be symbolic and stylized representations of a person or event rather than the authentic physical places of history (National atlas.gov, 2012). Unlike a museum that may include a variety of objects and potentially contradictory information about the history being referenced, a memorial tends to take a singular – usually positive – perspective (Lowenthal 1985). Regardless of the type of historic site, the very existence and preservation of the site suggests a collective (if not universal) statement of its historical significance, and its lasting value in the telling of the story of a community or a nation. By their very existence, these sites invite the question, “Why is this [still] here?” It is this question – “why?” – that makes historic sites and memorials intrinsically educational.

Field studies at historic sites provide the classroom teacher and K-12 students another way of interrogating the past using historical thinking skills. Such field studies address the emotions that are likely to emerge from the very act of placing oneself into the physical space where historical actors lived, worked, worshiped, died, and/or are celebrated (Vascellaro, 2011). Field studies incorporate the powerful ways that a visit to historic places “give concrete meaning to our history and our lives as no spoken or written word alone can do (Horton, 2000)” and help visitors “feel connected to the past ...because authentic artifacts seem to transport them straight back to the times when history was being made. (Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998, p. 12).

A teacher who takes seriously the task of linking the teaching of U.S. national history to student democratic practices within and outside of the classroom (Deardorff, Mvusi, McLemore, & Kolnick, 2005, p. 23) will embrace any and every opportunity to visit historic sites, memorials, and museums in their local community, region, and the National Mall.

The Need for Informed Interpretation of Historic Sites and Memorials.

This section focuses on memorials and monuments. I want to argue that the mere existence of a memorial is not the triumphant end of a given historical story, but rather the beginning. In a sense, public memorials and monuments have the ability to offer public debate that is well reasoned, articulate, and edifying. Through interpretation, effective technologies, partnerships, and humility, memorials might offer a more challenging, and also more interesting, venue for engaging classroom students in historical thinking than, perhaps, a museum (apologies to the Smithsonian Institution museums, all personal favorites).

Interpretation. If a person or event is worthy of representation, it is worthy of good and active interpretation as well. People and events of historical significance must be placed in a context for understanding, and perhaps appreciation, for future generations. If we truly want to honor the people and events that shaped our present and which may serve as guides to our collective future, we must offer representations that are more than resting places for migratory birds.

Effective Technologies. If democracy has value, and we want to instill in children and youth the habits of democracy, we cannot leave this to chance; the habits must be part of the design and engineering of our memorials and monuments using whatever communications and instructional technologies are available and, most importantly, are effective. One example is the National Park Service website, Teaching with Historic Places (<http://www.nps.gov/nr/twhp/>), which allows people to access the National Mall using virtual technology before, after, or instead of a visit to Washington DC.

Partnerships. As a teacher prepares students for a field study, the teacher has three important roles: to identify students' prior knowledge and important vocabulary that will help students understand what they might see and experience; to act as an observer on-site; and to help students engage in post-visit interpretation and meaning-making. Similarly, the on-site interpreter must be knowledgeable about the historical significance of the site, the controversies concerning the history that is being represented, the value of age-appropriate responses to student queries, and follow-up resources for classroom use. Effective partnerships can be formal and arranged prior to a field study. However, education professionals know to be ready for spontaneous moments of insight and how to support one another with age-appropriate extensions for student learning.

Humility. The permanence of monuments can create embarrassing anachronisms and errors; one recent (and costly) example is the public outrage following the poor and misleading editing of a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King on the King Memorial that implies that he boastfully perceived himself to be a drum major for justice, rather than a humble servant of the people's desires for justice. Therefore, some questions to discuss with a class could be: Who can make mistakes? How do we correct the mistakes that we make as individuals, as leaders, as governments? How do we avoid hurting people before we make big mistakes?

Two examples of how interpretation, effective technologies, partnerships, and humility can work together to create historical thinking opportunities for classroom teachers and students are the National World War II Memorial and the Vietnam Memorial.

The National World War II Memorial is potentially an all-encompassing memorial to all of the U.S. heroes of the War. In his opening statement, to the 105th Congress concerning the Commemorative Works Act, Sen. Craig Thomas, R-WY stated: “To my knowledge, no one objects to a World War II Memorial. That is not the issue. The issue is the process and the location. These are legitimate public questions because they affect not only history and the military, but specifically they are also placed on public lands and should have the input of any interested public party.” (Commemorative Works Act, 105th Congress).

Fierce debate ensued up to and beyond its opening in 2004 concerning its process and location, its design and its omissions (Shea, 2001; Benton-Short, 2006). In an American University graduate anthropology class on memory and remembrance, two students created a video of the interpretations and emotions of adult visitors to the World War II memorial to explore the “missing memories” (Schafft, 2010). Using this background information, a colleague and I explored the memorial with an eye toward how an elementary classroom teacher might bring students to the memorial and engage in historical thinking.

We used the basic technology of observation, pen and paper note taking, and close review of the *bas reliefs* and symbols to ask each other questions about the size, construction, and “message” of the Memorial. We joined a National Park Service ranger-led tour. Once his formal talk ended, the ranger conceded that, “No one had ever brought up the lack of diversity at the memorial before” our probing. No, the implied battles did not include the annihilation of Nagasaki and Hiroshima; yes, the soldiers all tend to look Caucasian; no, the Russians are not listed among our allies. When asked how he would share the memorial with elementary school students, he mentioned two stories that “always capture the attention of students” regarding Maidenform bras, hot airplane seats and underwear. In the process of asking hard questions, we were sensitive to the fact that we were not conforming, that we were creating discomfort, and that “no one” questions war memorials because it is, at best rude, and at worst unpatriotic. If a classroom teacher of questioning elementary students were to face the same discomfort, would there be room for the teacher and the interpreter to create a partnership to transform the experience into an exercise in age-appropriate critical historical thinking?

Among the things to see, think and wonder about the memorial, students may observe the absence of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics among the Allies; the absence of Tuskegee Army and the presence of the majority of enlisted African Americans and women doing menial work below their capabilities; and the absence of American Indian, Asian (especially Japanese) American and Latino enlisted persons. A follow-up activity could be to create plaques of forgotten people and places, including the Los Alamos site of nuclear weapons test site.

A critical question to explore with students might be why war memorials exist (Trofanenko, 2010). Is the purpose of commemorating wars to create a general cemetery when there are no specific remains; or to observe the national decision about how and why a war was declared? To explore these questions with young children is entirely age-appropriate, as they regularly

perceive history as predominately violent, and identify historical people as those “dying in a famous way” (Levstik, 2008b, p. 54).

In a recent Memorial Day interview with Howard Hatton, a Vietnam War veteran, we discussed the memorial known as The Wall. Following his 16-month tour of duty in Danang, Mr. Hatton returned home to California alive and uninjured, to a loving family, and a successful career. Three years later, he visited The Wall, identifying several of his friends and comrades among the casualties. It was an emotional experience and he has not visited it in subsequent trips to Washington. Mr. Hatton has 8 grandchildren, ages 2 – 21 and predicts that they would not have even a fraction of his emotional response by visiting the Wall, absent any historical context. As their tour guide, he would share his observations that low-income Blacks and Latinos were more often placed on the front lines in Vietnam and died and were injured in disproportionate numbers; and the experiences of African Americans in prior wars (for example, his uncle did not want to return to the States following his experience in the Korean War due to his experience of racism in the U.S.).

On such a field visit, he would want his grandchildren to get more than printed literature: instead, he would want them to engage with audio and video material that offer the context for the war; to have an opportunity to talk honestly with a knowledgeable interpreter who knows something about the history of the Vietnam War, and about the nature of war in general; to grasp the magnitude of the casualties by taking in all the names; and so on.

In addition, the Wall provokes lingering questions for Mr. Hatton. He wonders if the existence of the Wall is a reflection of the social unrest of the time? Why was it erected before the World War II memorial? Was it because we “won” World War II?

These are the kinds of questions that are part of historical thinking and which can be answered through humble interpretation, effective instructional technologies, and partnerships between schools and sites, for a Vietnam veteran, his 8 grandchildren, and any school visitors 100 years from now who seek understanding of the v-shaped black granite wall on the National Mall.

All of the stories – the ugly, the beautiful, the bitter and the bold – all of the stories of the formation, democratization, evolution and hopes for the United States deserve to be told. The National Mall is one of the most important sites for the telling of these stories. To be satisfying and instructive, the stories must come to resolution following the initial, “Once upon a time, there was a (person, place or thing) that occupied this spot.” I attempt to argue here that a humble offering of interpretation, effective technologies, and partnerships completes the story.

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