

Raymond J. Jirran

## **A. Introduction**

In explaining the nature of this course, Topic Two, "Introduction" also offered an explanation about contemporary culture. The present topic offers similar explanations. At a very deep level, this lesson is about how to listen, about the process of learning history. It is at that very deep level where the relationship between the readings in Chambers and this lecture find their nexus.

The overriding goal of this course is to enable the student the better to evaluate the times in which hi<sup>1</sup> lives. The course goal for the second topic is to enable the student the better to **evaluate democracy**. Democracy refers to the exercise of power. This sixth topic is such an exercise in that it treats the very nature of education.

Since these objectives are foolish if students do not accept them, this sixth lesson concerns a most important dimension of the course, namely why the course is taught. The Syllabus offers the best total rationale the professor is presently able to offer in writing. Students are invited to improve and modify that explanation now and at any other time they may think appropriate during the course.<sup>2</sup>

Educational researchers now suppose that college students typically go through stages of development: freshmen, when preordained conclusions are accepted from supposedly incontrovertible authority; sophomores and juniors who doubt that reason can know anything for sure, and consequently, rely on what feels right; graduate students who see reality as a matter of interpretation, with knowledge entirely subjective; full professors who admit biases but think that an approximation of reality can be reached. In this way, logic alone is not enough for mature judgments. The difference is between an answer and a good argument.<sup>3</sup> In this class, answers are suitable for the multiple-choice reviews; arguments for class discussion.

Full arguments require writing. That is why the professor offers his arguments in writing. As one scholar put it, "when the research is finished, the discussion with colleagues, the ruminations, the historian must write about it. A historian knows that the whole project may undergo radical change during the writing stage." That is another reason why students are required to reduce their own reaction to these lectures to writing, then exposed to the WEB itself.<sup>4</sup>

## **B. Thinking**

Five elements are involved in thinking: Realization, comprehension, synthesis, analysis, and evaluation. Educationists, id est (i.e.), educational theorists as distinct from teachers or educators, explain what is required in order to perform well in history courses. First of all comes a realization of the need to know, in this case how to think effectively and meaningfully about the times in which one lives. This is part of a way in which to explain the progression of steps one takes in learning.

Knowledge of words is fundamental. While at any college too many freshmen read only at a junior high school level, merely a lower elementary level of reading is required for this course. This skill students all have. Some will read faster than others, and that may be a rub. The syllabus has further reflections on language.

The next level of learning involves comprehension which means reciting the facts and adding a little more to them. Time, sequence, and chronology are vital to comprehending history. By

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relating all other dates to those thirteen already listed in Syllabus II, students may find learning time, sequence, and chronology easier.

After comprehending follows synthesis, whereby diverse elements, exempla gratia (e.g.), of German and English herstory,<sup>5</sup> are brought together, e.g., on the basis of the date posts already used. Only after this has been done is an analysis of similarities and differences possible. Finally comes the evaluation of what history means, which is what this course is about. Do think.

What does history mean? Dr. Jirran says that history means getting to know ourselves better so that we can like ourselves better and, thus, communicate better. This, in turn, enables us to reach out of ourselves toward our environment and ultimately, perhaps, toward our Creator(s). As of the fall of 1985, the professor has recognized that the basic function of history is to develop the personal identity of the individual students of whom he is one, within the total context of Western civilization.

This matter of identity is a source of trouble. As one scholar put it, there are "ever-building contradictions between schools and the social order."<sup>6</sup> The problem here is that "parental pressure . . . has always been more effective than the desire of educators to transmit cognitive skills and intellectual abilities."<sup>7</sup> This means that for adult students, such as those at Thomas Nelson Community College, an attempt at a meeting of minds is important for the objectives of the course.

## **C. Merit**

The readings are about absolutism. The task is to evaluate democracy within the absolutist context; to come to terms with the value of merit. In England the specialist worked for the gentry which recognized talent and birth, both. In the United Provinces, the specialist worked for the gentry, which was even more broadly based than in Great Britain. In Sweden, the specialist worked for the nobility as a unified whole. Talent alone was insufficient for entering the aristocracy. In Poland, the specialist worked for the specialist only, i.e., the nobles worked for themselves in a sort of fragmented disunity. In a democracy, the specialist works for the non-specialist, or, the people.

## **D. Conclusion**

This topic has explained the goal of the course and what is required to fulfill that goal. The goal of the presentation has been to enable students to evaluate democracy. In a democratic model, both the specialists, in this case the professors, and the non-specialist, the student, have important roles to play. This lecture has particular value in helping students understand the readings. The readings, by treating the Anti-absolutists and the Culture of the Age, also enable students to evaluate democracy.

Supplement

## **E. Introduction**

Section F, Class Activity, below used to be in the formal lecture, or notes, but was removed in order to meet the self-imposed space limitations of the formal lectures.

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**F. Class Activity**

Art-based, multimedia cultural approaches are valued in this course. Appropriate music may be used to help set moods. Drawings and cartoons are available for use on the overhead projector. Several of the topics are directly on the fine arts. Being on the WEB makes possible a better distribution and use of these approaches than before. The problem now is the human resources required for the task. The Professor is prioritizing establishing links to other WEB sites, but still has not settled on how to do that. Suggestions are welcome.

Verbalization forms the basis of this activity. Students must know words. That is one reason why vocabulary is considered part of every review. The meaning of the additional media is rooted in these words. Dialogue is important, whereby students themselves use the words. Experience namely the experience of evaluating and thinking, is what comes last and is the purpose of it all.

Studies have shown that students get more out of their reading without, rather than with, leading questions. Such questions tend to limit rather than expand what students integrate into what they already know. Realizing this, students may expect an evaluation which will both include unanticipated exercises and will reflect whether or not they have met the goals of the course.

Evaluation, both in and out of academia, is frequently based on merit. That accounts for Section C. Merit, above. For most of us merit is the only way we have either to sustain or improve our situations.

**G. Language**

Historians have inquired into the social history of language. They find it hard to believe that the Italian literacy rate of thirty-eight percent, documented in 1911, was never any higher than that previously. In the United States, at the time of the American Revolution, literacy was estimated at ten percent. A problem may have been that language was sexist. Discourse at the time of the French Revolution lacked the language women required for their own self-expression.<sup>8</sup>

Language has been defined as "a dialect backed by an army."<sup>9</sup> This means that politics is never very far away from truth, though it is truth which is supposed to determine politics, rather than politics either truth or language. In France the government itself enforces what is correct French, whereas in the United States the government stays out entirely as people "goof" around with how to say things. This has given American English greater flexibility than any other language.

Language has a factitious character as nations cling one to one language, another to another. National identity and language are linked. Dr. Jirran thinks that when groups themselves are excluded from the national identity, they have a difficult time learning, because they do not relate as well as those for whom the language is being constructed. The Professor watches for this to happen as smaller European linguistic nationalities assert themselves as the European Economic Community erodes the sovereignty of nation states.<sup>10</sup>

There is yet one more scholarly mess in progress. Some scholars, the social scientists in particular, like to count words, and from that draw conclusions about what people mean. Other scholars, linguists in particular, like to search for the lack of meanings symbolized by words. Historians find themselves caught in the crunch between the deconstructionists, who question meaning, and the social scientists, who question how many times words are used. In other words, everyone has a problem with language, whether or not the particular language was prepared for them in the first place or not.<sup>11</sup>

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## H. Education<sup>12</sup>

Education, as an academic field in its own right, "is often depicted as an intellectual wasteland." The school of education at Yale collapsed during the 1950s and later, at Duke, in the 1980s. There has been little resistance. Faculty members at leading research universities have commonly dismissed schools of education as painful embarrassments.

Public schools, and Thomas Nelson Community College is a public school, have often been prized as guarantors of morality, social order, and individual mobility. Just the same, teachers have been long devalued in terms of status and salary.

## I. Conclusion

By this time perceptive students some now in the second semester with the professor, will remember that he has said that good histories of the professions are lacking. Education is one of those professions, unlike others, for which a lecture may be propounded. Education is just as much at the heart of democracy as it is at the heart of culture. That is why the course goal for this topic is to evaluate the times in which hi lives, to evaluate democracy.

Comments on the Seventh Edition of Chambers, pages 624-629

In the opinion of the professor, Chambers is the most scholarly textbook on the market. Chambers well represents mainstream thinking in the history profession. The professor, however, disagrees in many significant ways with mainstream thinking. Some of these disagreements are set forth above and others in the following comments.

Page Column

Paragraph  
Line

0626 1 3 5 "(Since the first censuses were not taken until the early nineteenth century, all population figures prior to that time are only estimates.)"

Chambers is unclear. The first census in the United States was taken in 1790. On Sunday, February 13, 2000 at 1:00 p.m., at <http://bible.gospelcom.net>, there were seventeen references to *census* in the English NIV Bible, including three in the New Testament. The Bible mentions censuses many times. The Rosetta Stone has reference to census. Chambers may just as well have said that "all population figures are only estimates."

0628 2 4 3-4 "...the rise of the factory system in the late eighteenth century."

Chambers is tricky here. He is referring to steam-driven factories. There were earlier factory systems in Ancient History and Early Modern Times. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate (r) Dictionary* dates the first use of the word *factory* 1582.<sup>13</sup>

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On page 627 Chambers refers to "...`factories,' on the West African coast..." On page 652 Chambers refers to "...`factories' in India..."

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Hi is not a typographical error. Hi is an attempt to call attention to the fact that language bears the culture and that the prejudices of the culture are inherent in the language. Hi and hir for he or she or for his or hers is a very rare approach to identifying the issue. I have lost my source for who or where this usage is a regular phenomenon. I would appreciate any one knowing calling that to my attention. Students have checked this usage with other members of the Thomas Nelson Community College teaching faculty and such usage is a matter more of general knowledge than of lexicographical exactness.

<sup>2</sup> In the Winter of 1987, a student expressed anger with the forthrightness of this lecture. Upon reflection, perhaps a lot of what is here belongs in the Supplement to Topic Two, or, at least, in a more subtle form of presentation. At the same time, there is scholarly merit to the very notion that synthesis is legitimate. Eric H. Monkkonen, "Notes and Comment: `The Dangers of Synthesis,' The American Historical Review, Vol. 91, No. 5 (December 1986), pp. 1146-57 points out that the mainstream of the profession is calling for synthesis. The student in question argued, with the "Dangers of Synthesis" article, that insufficient information was available from the course to make valid synthesis. Yet, in a book review, later in that same edition, Thomas D. Clark, review of C. Vann Woodward, Thinking Back: The Perils of Writing History, The American Historical Review, Vol. 91, No. 5 (December 1986), p. 1258, Thomas D. Clark observes that "the historian has to start somewhere."

What makes the professor persist is the Soviet historian, Donald W. Treadgold, review of V. A. Tishkov, Istoriia i istorikii v SShA (History and Historians in the U. S. A.), The American Historical Review, Vol. 91, No. 5 (December 1986), p. 1259, in that same edition who concluded that the American historical profession remained "an essential element in the ideological mechanism of the contemporary state-monopoly capitalism of the U. S. A. The persistent point is this: without synthesis, analysis, and evaluation, students are subject to becoming the automatons which thinkers like Nietzsche and the Communists lay on us. Nietzsche said we were becoming human sand, simply interchangeable parts in the production line of life. The breakdown of how we go about thinking about history is a judgment about the relationship between our culture, here and now, and the cultures with which we are trying to make contact in the historical past.

<sup>3</sup> Time, February 16, 1987, p. 61. The research is being done by Karen Strohm Kitchener and Patricia King.

<sup>4</sup> Sallie Pisani, review of Robin W. Winks, Cloak and Gown: Scholars in the Secret War, 1939-1961 in The Journal of American History, 76 (June 1989): 302-303.

<sup>5</sup> As distinct from history. Get it?

<sup>6</sup> Jurgen Herbst, review of Michael B. Katz, Reconstructing American Education in The American Historical Review, Vol. 93 No. 5 (December 1988), 1389.

<sup>7</sup> Jurgen Herbst, review of Michael B. Katz, Reconstructing American Education in The American Historical Review, Vol. 93 No. 5 (December 1988), 1389.

<sup>8</sup> James D. Tracy, review of Peter Burke and Roy Porter, eds., The Social History of Language in The American Historical Review, Vol. 95, No. 3 (June 1990), page 772.

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Steinberg as cited by James D. Tracy, review of Peter Burke and Roy Porter, eds., The Social History of Language in The American Historical Review, Vol. 95, No. 3 (June 1990), page 772.

<sup>10</sup> James D. Tracy, review of Peter Burke and Roy Porter, eds., The Social History of Language in The American Historical Review, Vol. 95, No. 3 (June 1990), page 772.

<sup>11</sup> James D. Tracy, review of Peter Burke and Roy Porter, eds., The Social History of Language in The American Historical Review, Vol. 95, No. 3 (June 1990), page 772.

<sup>12</sup> Drawn from William J. Reese, review of Geraldine Joncich Clifford and James W. Guthrie, Ed School: A Brief for Professional Education in The Journal of American History, Vol. 76 No. 1 (June 1989), 234-235.?

<sup>13</sup> *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate (r) Dictionary Tenth Edition* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 1993), page 416.