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## Remedying Our Amnesia

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## *Education's Histories*

methodological grist for the  
history of education

### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Warren, “Waging War on Education: American Indian Versions,” *Education's Histories* 2 (January 29, 2015), <http://www.educationshistories.org/waging-war-education-american-indian-versions/>.

## Remedying Our Amnesia

*Adrea Lawrence*

### How can this be? How did this come to be?

In his January 2015 essay, “Waging War on Education: American Indian Versions,” Donald Warren offers a methodological afterimage of “school” scholarship in education history.<sup>1</sup> Originally presented as a paper at the 2014 International Standing Conference for the History of Education conference in London, Warren calls attention to flaws in the research designs frequently used by education historians. Though many revelatory histories have been created by looking at the development of the institution of the school, its variants, and its participants, including those who fought for access to it, Warren argues this is no longer adequate because it amplifies the position of the school as the most apparent—and thus most important—means through which people learn. In so doing, it malforms the methods education historians use in their research. If one believes this is true, then it is all too easy to begin and end inquiry there. In turn, it becomes unwittingly easy to convey the impression that people without schools are thus uneducated and unlearning. Warren argues that this position is flat-wrong, and he elucidates why in his January 2015 essay.

Through several examples, Warren considers the methodological limitations of convention and offers a new methodological portal through which historians of education can jump in order to rectify the

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ethical gap that an overemphasis on the school has produced. By reading outside of education history as a field and relating other scholars' methods and findings to education history, Warren offers lessons which may well propel historians of education in novel directions and remedy research designs that place the school, rather than learning, at the center of inquiry. These lessons include the issue of periodization, a reliance on a definitional approach to the study of education history, an over-reliance on inscribed texts, and the absence of memory. At each turn, Warren's essay begs the twin questions, "How can this be?" and "How did this come to be?," in deconstructing the foundational historians' histories of education.

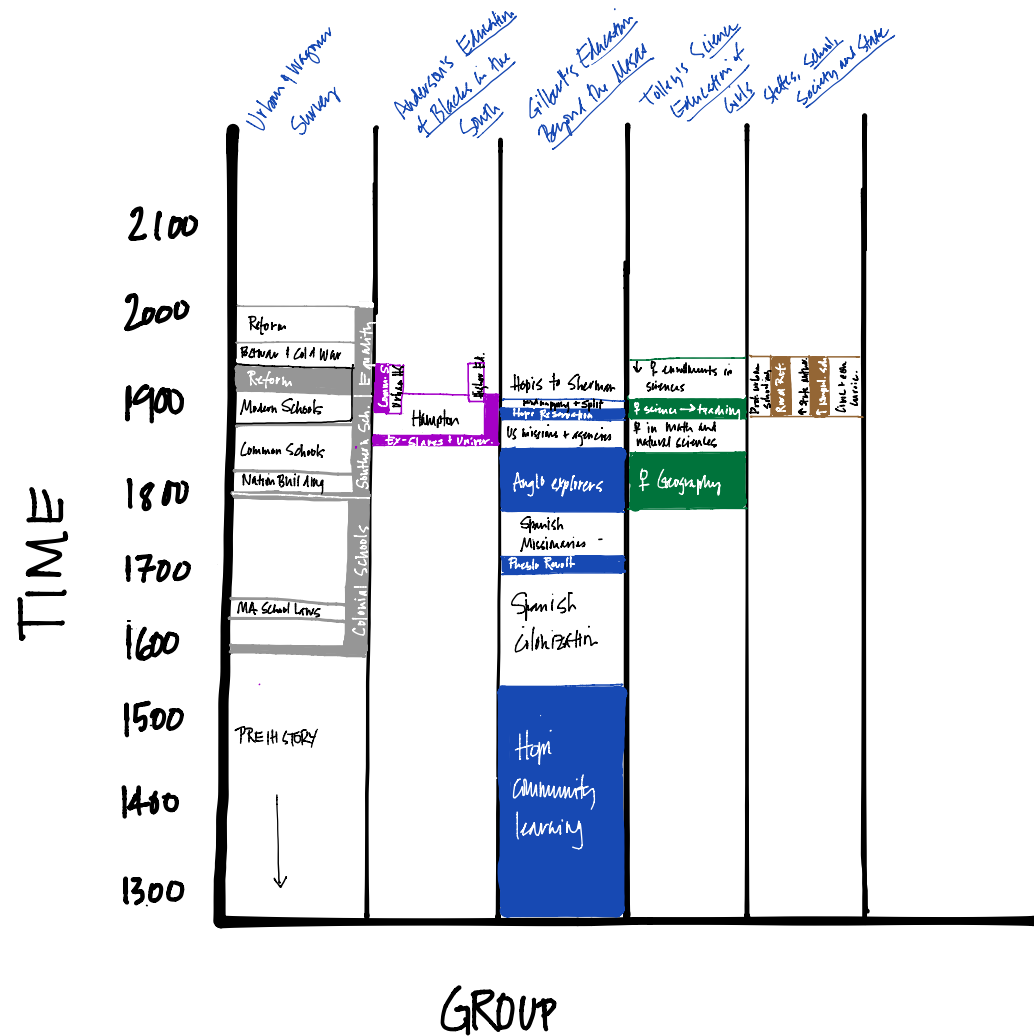
## Periodization

Stories must start somewhere, and Lawrence Cremin's historical trilogy on education begins in 1607, the year the English established a permanent settlement in the Chesapeake Bay.<sup>2</sup> Warren's essay, in contrast, begins in 1970 with an aside in part one of Cremin's trilogy: that of Mohawk leaders poised to meet their English counterparts in London in the early eighteenth century. Warren is curious about the scene in which Mohawk and English leaders meet. He primes us to be attentive to what the educative moment between the two groups might look like. What did participants learn through the encounter? What did they teach others? Warren then delivers a blow: This meeting between the Mohawk and the English "failed to capture Cremin's speculative interest."<sup>3</sup> *How can this be? How did this come to be?*

One explanation is rooted in assumptions about time and who gets to mark it across cultures. Cremin's book, *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783*, is illustrative. The title alone hinges on the assumptions that 1) "education" in North America began with Europeans and Euroamericans, and 2) education history is grounded in the formation of the United States as a political and social entity. This stands in relief to counter assumptions that Warren suggests: 1) education was diverse and deliberate among Native communities, and 2) education history has a

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Arthur Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783* (Harper & Row, 1970); *ibid.*, *American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982); *ibid.*, *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience, 1876-1980* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, *American Education: The Colonial Experience*.



This is a rendering of comparative periodizations in well-known and regarded histories of education. See W. Urban and J. Wagoner, *American Education: A History*, vol. 4th (New York: Routledge, 2009). James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988). Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert, *Education Beyond the Mesas: Hopi Students at Sherman Institute, 1902-1929* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010). Kim Tolley, *The Science Education of American Girls: A Historical Perspective* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002). Tracy L. Steffes, *School, Society, and State: A New Education to Govern Modern America, 1890-1940* (Chicago; London: University Of Chicago Press, 2012).

much longer and much broader trajectory in social and cultural formation in the western hemisphere than our written histories reveal.

The question of when education in the Americas began is one that Warren has been asking for some time now.<sup>4</sup> This is not a question to chide education historians; rather, it is a question about our fundamental assumptions about our field, including how we periodize it. How we mark time illustrates what we study and how we study it. Some have proposed that education historians who study different populations talk about their periodization schema as they relate to the field at large.<sup>5</sup>

Historians of education might also examine how periodization varies with place, much like Nancy Beadie is doing in her work on the policy histories of schooling that start with the states and territories in the American West.<sup>6</sup> Periodization, though, is but one element in a multifaceted, and flawed, research design.

## The Problem with a Definitional Approach

Warren's question, "When did education in the Americas begin?," also begs the historian to check her assumptions about what "education" is and is not. Do we know what it is before we begin our inquiry? Should we know what it is before we start our research?

Warren attends to these questions in turn through his juxtapositioning of William Fenton's *American Indians and White Relations to 1830: Needs and Opportunities for Study* against Bernard Bailyn's *Education in the Forming of American Society*, presentations they each gave at the same Needs and Opportunities for Study conference series in the 1950s.<sup>7</sup> Fenton, Warren demonstrates, presented listeners and readers with anthropological fieldwork and a demonstration of how one might examine it in trying to understand how American Indians and Euroamericans came to understand their societies in relation to one another. Using Fenton's demonstration, Warren critiques Bailyn's new book, *The Barbarous Years*, exposing how, through source selection, Bailyn assumes that European

<sup>4</sup> Donald Warren, "We the Peoples: When American Education Began," *American Educational History Journal* 34, no. 2 (2007): 235–47; *ibid.*, "Twisted Time," in *Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice: Methods at the Margins*, ed. Rachele Winkle-Wagner, Cheryl Hunter, and Debora Hinderliter Ortloff (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 97–110; *ibid.*, "American Indian Histories as Education History," *History of Education Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (August 1, 2014): 255–85, doi:10.1111/hoeq.12067.

<sup>5</sup> Glenn P. Lauzon et al., "Periodizing Education's Histories," (History of Education Society, St. Louis, MO, November 5-7, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Nancy Beadie, "Education and State Formation in the U.S. West: The Significance of Schooling in 'Greater Reconstruction,' 1846-1890" (History of Education Society, Seattle, WA, November 3, 2012); *ibid.*, "War, Education, and State Formations: Problems of Territorial and Political Integration in the US (1848-1912)" (International Standing Conference for the History of Education, London, July 25, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> William N. Fenton, *American Indian and White Relations to 1830: Needs and Opportunities for Study* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1957); Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society: Needs and Opportunities for Study* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960). Fenton's book was the second book published in the Needs and Opportunities series; Bailyn's was the third. See also Storr, "The Role of Education in American History: A Memorandum for the Committee Advising the Fund for the Advancement of Education in Regard to This Subject," *Harvard Education Review* 46, no. 3 (1976): 331-354.

<sup>8</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The Barbarous Years: The Peopling of British North America: The Conflict of Civilizations, 1600-1675* (New York: Knopf, 2012).

and Euroamerican colonization of North America was an always already done deal.<sup>8</sup> In spite of presenting and publishing in the same inquiry series as Fenton, Bailyn does not use Native sources, and he does not use much, if any, of the recent scholarship on American Indian history in his latest book, *The Barbarous Years*. Given the veritable explosion of new research the field, *how can this be?*

Warren contends that a flawed research design provokes such an egregious oversight. He highlights how a definitional research design carries colonialist assumptions about the nature, direction, and substance of education and its histories, even if this is not the inquiring historian's intention. *So, how can such an approach be rectified?*

Warren asks historians of education to “cleanse their methods of ethnocentrism and similar predispositions” by treating “education” as a methodology rather than a definition. He argues, “education history is required to meet a basic standard: It must be educative along the path toward discovery of a particular relevant topic.”<sup>9</sup> This adheres to Richard Storr's 1961 advice to follow learning where it surfaces.<sup>10</sup> This means that evidence of learning might surface in unfamiliar terrain such as reports from archaeological digs, oral tradition, or custom; evidence might also be found in song, ritual, eschatology, or how humans have built their physical environments. Historians of education, like their counterparts in other fields and subfields must learn how to read and interpret such evidence and consider it a part of their own research agendas. So far, few have attempted this. *How can this be? How did this come to be?*

<sup>9</sup> Donald Warren, “Waging War on Education: American Indian Versions,” *Education's Histories* 2 (January 29, 2015), <http://www.educationshistories.org/waging-war-education-american-indian-versions/>.

<sup>10</sup> Richard J. Storr, “The Education of History: Some Impressions,” *Harvard Educational Review* 31, no. 2 (Spring 1961): 124–35.

## Inscribed Texts

As he demonstrates with the Mohawk-English encounter, Warren argues that deep scholarship in American Indian history and anthropology has been largely missing from standard education histories. Coupled with a periodization scheme and research design that begins with the school, this missing piece of education history also stems from the fact that historians of education have conventionally relied upon inscribed texts that are readable and interpretable to historians trained

primarily in document analysis. This reliance, Warren argues, has become an over-reliance, and it has produced education histories that depend upon the institutions which produced and relied upon such texts. As a result, the history of education as a field has been firmly grounded in the colonial history of the school.<sup>11</sup> And this has had the effect of placing Indigenous North Americans in school when studying their education histories. Did Native peoples only become educated after Europeans and Euroamericans brought them the school? Ample tribal, anthropological, and archaeological evidence screams, “No!”

Placing “education” mostly within the school marks a profound irony, given that education historians have lauded Bernard Bailyn’s 1960 call to broaden the scope of study beyond the institution of the school to include cultural formation.<sup>12</sup> Such an irony also suggests an ethical gap, one that assumes colonization is an always already done deal. Warren contends that Lawrence Cremin’s binary approach to analyzing the Mohawk-English encounter—that of the colonizer and the soon-to-be-colonized—buttressed conventional narratives about the “deficiency” of American Indian educational practices in relation to “dominant” Euroamerican institutions.<sup>13</sup>

Warren does not share Cremin’s interpretation or apparent assumption about the inevitability of colonization. Warren asks education historians to resolve the ethical gap that progressive histories of the U.S. and the U.S. school have produced by refashioning our methodological ways. This means that we should 1) follow the traces of learning where they exist instead of where we expect to find them, 2) read outside of our subfield of education history and our field of history, and 3) release ourselves from the Bailyn and Cremin approaches. Such efforts might spark remedy.

## The Absence of Memory

Such an effort might also begin to ameliorate the loss of memory about our past that is evident in our present-day and historical assumptions. Literary scholar Paula Gunn Allen writes, “An odd thing occurs in the minds of Americans when Indian civilization is mentioned: little or nothing.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Arguing that the field of education history has emphasized the history of the school and thus inhabits a colonial paradigm does not preclude studies that have demonstrated how the school was a liberating institution for many groups. Rather, the school and its accompanying colonial paradigm have served as a paradox and a trickster, occluding researchers’ assumptions about “education.” See Adrea Lawrence, “Our Trickster, the School part 1,” *Education’s Histories* 1 (May 1, 2014), <http://www.educationshistories.org/trickster-school-part-1/>; Ibid., “Our Trickster, the School part 2,” *Education’s Histories* 1 (May 8, 2014), <http://www.educationshistories.org/trickster-school-part-2/>; Ibid., “Our Trickster, the School part 3,” *Education’s Histories* 1 (May 15, 2014), <http://www.educationshistories.org/trickster-school-part-3/>; Ibid., “Our Trickster, the School part 4,” *Education’s Histories* 1 (May 22, 2014), <http://www.educationshistories.org/trickster-school-part-4/>.

<sup>12</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society: Needs and Opportunities for Study* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960).

<sup>13</sup> Donald Warren, “Waging War on Education: American Indian Versions,” *Education’s Histories* 2 (January 29, 2015), <http://www.educationshistories.org/waging-war-education-american-indian-versions/>.

<sup>14</sup> Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 213.

<sup>15</sup> Nancy Beadie, “Response to Bernard Bailyn’s Education and the Forming of American Society” (History of Education Society, Cambridge, MA November 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 31.

<sup>17</sup> The Crow’s reservation period began in 1882 and it continues today.

<sup>18</sup> Counting coup is the act of forcing one’s enemy to see that they have lost to you in a confrontation. Warriors could count coup by touching their enemy’s breastworks in battle before killing them, taking their enemy’s weapons while the enemy is still alive, stealing horses from the enemy’s camp, and touching the first enemy in battle. It is worth noting that Plenty Coups, the Crow leader at the time of the creation of the Crow reservation, was clearly recognized of having counted coup many times. Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 19.

This statement was echoed by Nancy Beadie’s response to Bailyn’s *Education and the Forming of American Culture* at the 2010 History of Education Society meeting in Cambridge, Massachusetts.<sup>15</sup> Coupled together, Beadie’s and Allen’s observations serve as a further illustrations of the ethical gap that results from the assumption of colonization’s one-directional, manifest pull. *How is this? How did this come to be?*

Philosopher Jonathan Lear suggests that such an assumption—and its resultant gap—stem from a stunted exploration of how power shapes a range of possible true stories. Lear writes, “the issue that concerns us is not in who has the power to tell the story—however important that might be; it is rather how power shapes what any true story could possibly be.”<sup>16</sup> Limiting inquiry to conventional, colonialist periodizations, relying on inscribed texts, and approaching education as schooling shield the possible stories that historians of education can consider in constructing education histories. And this range of possible true stories, argues Warren, is what we might be missing by operating with the *telos*—the school—in mind, even if backgrounded so as to be nearly invisible. This is damning because it can prevent us from seeing the trace of learning where we might not expect to find it.

But Lear offers a possible way out. He examines why “little or nothing” happens when, in the case of the Crow (Absarokee), the buffalo went away, or, in the case of non-Natives, American Indian civilizations are brought to the fore. Lear then raises the possibility of revealing a range of possible true stories by considering a variety of possible psychological states within a given culturally rich matrix of meaning. In reconstructing the context in which cultural apocalypse and rebirth have happened within the Crow (Absarokee) community, Lear recreates possible psychological states that existed in the ideal Crow worldview before the reservation period.<sup>17</sup> In a culture built around the honor in counting coup and defending the community’s territory, the permanent, static demarcation of landholdings through the reservation system marked nothing less than a near total disintegration of meaning in Crow culture.<sup>18</sup> By making territory static in a warrior society, there was, in effect, nothing left to defend.

As a philosopher, Lear works ethnographically to explore how power shifts the shape of the stories



we tell ourselves and others. As historians of education, we too might also work to cultivate an historical and ethnographic imagination that that begins with possibilities for learning and follows threads through unfamiliar sources and seemingly foreign terrain, including possible psychological states. We might well go in feeling blind, but we might well come out seeing as we have not before.

We might jump into memory's afterimage. This means we can find learning if we allow ourselves to wander with our eyes and ears wide open, attuned to learning in a variety of forms.



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Adrea Lawrence & Sara Clark, co-curators

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