From Diaries to Digital Footprints
The Changing Nature of Primary Sources in the Digital Age

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For the panel at the 2013 Annual Western History Association on Methodologies for Teaching Frontiers, Borderlands, and Imagined Places

This lesson is intended to supplement Melody Miyamoto Walters’ presentation “From the Little House to the Big Classroom: Using Laura Ingalls Wilder as a Primary Source.”

Historians focus on and interpret the accessible primary sources of the past; however, the sources that are available are changing dramatically in the digital age. In this lesson, students will consider the primary sources they are leaving behind and how these sources would give future historians insight into a student’s life today. The basic idea for the lesson is to encourage students to think of themselves as having “a history” and to reflect on how the sources created in the present will aid historians in the future. Through this reflection, students will consider the historian’s craft—finding, analyzing, and interpreting extant sources to reconstruct meaning including the motivations of people involved and the significance of the actions of people of the past. However, the sources currently being produced are of quite a different nature than the diaries, letters, and records of the past. Historians will be both overwhelmed with the sheer amount of sources produced in the digital age, but also empowered to search and make sense of these sources more rapidly and efficiently than past generations.

• **Note:** the original idea for this activity came after hearing from Melody Miyamoto Walters that, during her study of diaries of Overland Trail travelers, a number of the authors intentionally wrote “Do Not Read” in their accounts. This sparked the idea of what sources are we producing now that we wouldn’t necessarily want others to see, and the idea of the importance of talking about our “digital footprint” and online responsibility with students of all ages.

**Applicability:**

• This lesson is applicable to any Middle or High School Social Studies class. It could be a brief, one period class discussion, or it could extend over two class periods depending on the teacher’s preference and use of extension activities.

• Additionally, this lesson gives entry into discussing responsible online behavior and the lasting implications of our digital footprint.

**Key Vocabulary:**

• **Digital Footprint:** the data trail left by interactions in a digital environment including the use of the internet, and devices connected or networked.

• **The Historian’s Craft:** finding, analyzing, and interpreting extant sources to reconstruct meaning including the motivations of people involved and the significance of the actions of people of the past.
Instructional Material:


Enduring Understanding (Big Idea): Everything and everyone has a history, but the way we tell that history is changing in the digital age.

Essential Questions:

- How will the historian’s craft change as the nature and extent of available sources changes?
- What is my digital footprint and why is this important?

Suggested Procedure: This lesson can supplement any unit in which students analyze primary sources to construct meaning about the past. This lesson can build upon these experiences and involve students in a discussion about the changing nature of sources and how historians make sense of the past through source analysis.

The teacher leads the class in a discussion about what sources are being created in the present:

- How are sources created today both different from and similar to more traditional sources from the past?
- What challenges/opportunities will these sources present for future historians?
- How will the traditional repositories of our nation’s sources (Library of Congress, National Archives, etc.) keep up with the massive proliferation of digital sources?

Next, as a class, students will read the following blog post:

- Note that students should focus not only on the text of the initial article, but also on the comments that follow the article, realizing that both constitute sources on the subject.
- Questions for discussion:
  - How does collecting tweets advance the mission of the Library of Congress?
  - What arguments in favor of this policy can you envision?
  - What arguments opposed to this policy can you envision?
  - How can this article be considered a primary source? Imagine a historian 150 years from now examining events from 2013. What sources would the historian use to reconstruct events, to interpret the motivations of historical actors, and to evaluate the significance of past actions?

Assignment: Assessing your Digital Footprint:

- General Reflection Question: What sources have you created in the past week? Reflect on the question and construct categories that help organize the types of sources you have created (i.e., school-related, personal, family communications, etc.). Are there some sources you would not want others to read? Why?
- General Reflection Question: Using the sources you have left behind, how would a historian 150 years from now reconstruct your life, the choices you made, the opportunities you had, the obstacles you overcame, your motivations and impact?
Exploring the Specifics:

1. Quantify your digital footprint:
   - How many texts, tweets, Facebook posts, emails, have you sent in the past week?
2. What other activities constitute your digital footprint over the past week?
3. Choose five different types of sources that you have created over the past week (digital and otherwise). These might include:
   - A series of tweets, Facebook posts, email exchanges, or texts.
   - Records created for academic classes, notes, homework, etc.
   - Email or other communications from teachers, academic reports.
   - Photos from events in which you took part.
   - Diary entries, personal reflections.
4. If a historian 150 years from now discovered only a partial record of the sources you’ve detailed above, how would they reconstruct your life at this moment? What insight into your motivations, interests, personality, and activities would these sources provide? What further information would a historian need to construct meaning from these sources?
5. Would these give a full picture of you? In what way would this be incomplete? What else would a historian need to know to more fully understand you and your life? What sources exist to complete this picture? How would understanding your context help interpret the sources you have left?

Evaluations (Assessment):

- Students will complete a two-page reflection in which they synthesize the common issues between the two topics:
  - How will the historian’s craft change as the nature and extent of available sources changes?
  - What is my digital footprint and why is this important?
    - See page 9 for the rubric used for evaluation.

Possible Extension Activities:

- **Internet User Agreement:** Consider having students analyze their institution’s Internet/Technology Usage Agreement, treating this document as a primary source and analyzing it through the lens of a historian of the future. What would the historian interpret and conclude about our time based on this document?
- **Read and discuss current articles on the importance of one’s digital footprint:**
  - “Measure Mandating Social Media Education in Middle School Clears Assembly.” *North Jersey News*, May 20, 2013. Available at: [http://tinyurl.com/phlgssp](http://tinyurl.com/phlgssp)
  - “8% of Young Adults Say Facebook History Hurt Job Prospects.” *Pudget Sound Business Journal*, June 3, 2013. Available at: [http://tinyurl.com/n9rjerh](http://tinyurl.com/n9rjerh)
    - The text of each article is included below on pages 7-8.
- **Digital Footprints Gone Wrong:** Consider having students read and assess when someone’s digital footprint had a damaging impact on them personally or professionally. NOTE: most examples that fall into this category will **not** be suitable for Middle or High School student audiences due to the subject matter. This may be a post-secondary extension.
This same extension could be done with a simple reflection by the students, asking them to consider the lasting nature of one’s digital footprint and the need for responsible online activity.

- **Digital Footprints: Mitch Daniels vs. Howard Zinn:** Have students consider the recent issue of Mitch Daniels, the former governor of Indiana and current president of Purdue University, who was found to have urged his staff to eliminate Howard Zinn’s work from all classrooms in Indiana.
  
  - “Emails Reveal that Mitch Daniels, as Governor, Tried to Ban Howard Zinn Book,” *Inside Higher Ed*, July 17, 2013. Available at: [http://tinyurl.com/ppse7od](http://tinyurl.com/ppse7od)
  - The text of the article is given below on pages 6-7.
  
  - Note that, for the purpose of this lesson, students should focus on how the digital footprint left by Gov. Daniels’ communications caused his actions to be called into question, not necessarily the issue of whether or not Zinn’s work should be taught or the issues the incident brings up about academic freedom.
Measure mandating social media education in middle school clears Assembly

Monday, May 20, 2013  BY  ANTHONY CAMPISI

A bill that would mandate schools teach middle schoolers about acceptable use of social media cleared the Assembly Monday with strong bipartisan support.

The measure would ensure students in grades six through eight get information on the proper use of social media platforms, cyber security and preventing cyber bullying.

“Social media is powering the world today and can affect college prospects, job opportunities and much more,” said Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttle, D-Englewood, said in a statement. “It’s important that we teach kids at an early age to use these tools responsibly so they don’t make any foolish mistakes that could derail their lives before they even get started.”

The legislation was introduced in the wake of the suicide of Rutgers University freshman Tyler Clementi after his roommate taped him having a romantic encounter with another man.

8% of young adults say their Facebook history hurt job prospects

Shana Lynch, Managing Editor, Silicon Valley Business Journal

By now, most people know not to post photos of their all-night binges on Facebook.

Well, you’d think.

According to a survey by mobile tracking company On Device Research, about 8 percent of 16- to 24-year-olds lost a job opportunity because of what they posted on a social media profile.

Looks like a few birthdays helps your sense. Of 25- to 34-year-olds, a slightly improved 7 percent were rejected for a job because of those social media pics.

Still, a majority of American Millennials and Gen Y don't particularly care to censor their Twitter or Facebook accounts. Two-thirds say they aren’t concerned their social media profiles could hurt their job prospects, and many also alter their profiles for their friends’ benefit, not prospective employers.

The study surveyed 6,000 mobile users aged 16-34 in six different countries. The geographical area most impacted by what they say online is China. Between 14 percent and 16 percent of respondents said they’ve been turned down for a job because of their comments and pictures online. Least impacted are the Brazilians, at 4 to 5 percent.

Facebook costing 16-34s jobs in tough economic climate

Wednesday May 29, 2013

We have just finished the third wave of our Young People’s Consumer Confidence (YPCC) Index, which is designed to help businesses understand what young people (16-34) think about their current and future economic and employment prospects, in both developed and growth markets.

The index which covers 6000 16-34 year olds across six countries revealed some surprising results.
Impact of social media on careers

If getting a job was not hard enough in this tough economic climate, one in ten young people have been rejected for a job because of their social media profile.

Yet worryingly the majority (two-thirds) are not concerned that their use of social media now, may harm their future career prospects and are not deterred from using it.

They are also more likely to have altered their social media profile to look good to their friends, as opposed to prospective employers.

Better education of the impact of social media is needed, to ensure young people are not making it even harder for themselves to get on the career ladder.
E-mails reveal that Mitch Daniels, as governor, tried to ban Howard Zinn book
By Scott Jaschik on July 17, 2013

Mitch Daniels, as an unconventional choice to become Purdue University's president, has repeatedly pledged his strong commitment to academic freedom. And many professors -- including some who had questioned the wisdom of appointing a governor as university president -- have given him high marks for the start of his work at Purdue. [1]

But on Monday, the Associated Press published an article [2] based on e-mail records it obtained under Indiana's open records laws. Those e-mail records showed Daniels, while governor of Indiana, asking that no public universities teach the work of Howard Zinn, seeking a statewide investigation into "what is credit-worthy" to see that similar works were not being taught for credit, and considering ways to cut state funds to a program led by a professor who had criticized him.

It is not unheard of, of course, for governors to periodically speak out against controversial professors or books (although most academics would prefer that governors not do so). But the case of Daniels appears different in that he didn't speak out, but rather exchanged e-mail messages with state education officials about how to take action against certain works and professors. While Daniels is known as a strong fiscal conservative (as a politician and university leaders), his reputation has also been as someone who was more interested in balancing budgets than in waging culture wars.

In a statement to the AP, Daniels indicated that his e-mail messages were only about elementary and secondary schools, but the AP descriptions of the e-mails suggest otherwise. While the e-mails show concern about how teachers were being trained, that training was going on at universities.

The first e-mail discussed is about Zinn, [3] a longtime Boston University professor best known for 1980 book, A People's History of the United States, [4] which describes American history from the perspective of black people, women, low-income workers and others whom Zinn argued were ignored in more mainstream history. The book has sold well through several editions, and earned Zinn generations of student and faculty fans, generally from the left. He has also been repeatedly criticized by conservatives (and by some who are not conservative, but who have argued that Zinn oversimplified many issues).

Shortly after Zinn died in 2010, Daniels e-mailed various education officials about Zinn, the AP said. His e-mail said: "This terrible anti-American academic has finally passed away. The obits and commentaries mentioned his book A People's History of the United States is the 'textbook of choice in high schools and colleges around the country.' It is a truly execrable, anti-factual piece of disinformation that misstates American history on every page. Can someone assure me that it is not in use anywhere in Indiana? If it is, how do we get rid of it before more young people are force-fed a totally false version of our history?"

When an aide responded by saying that a course at Indiana University did use Zinn's work, Daniels wrote that something should be done about it. "This crap should not be accepted for any credit by the state. No student will be better taught because someone sat through this session. Which board has jurisdiction over what counts and what doesn't?" Daniels wrote.

The e-mails show Daniels endorsing a plan to have Teresa Lubbers, the commissioner of higher education, review courses throughout the state, while the State Board of Education conducted a similar review. Wrote Daniels in approving the plan: "Go for it. Disqualify propaganda and highlight (if there is any) the more useful offerings."

The AP article does not indicate whether Lubbers carried out the plan. She did not respond to e-mail messages from Inside Higher Ed Tuesday night. [UPDATE: On Wednesday, Lubbers said that she was never asked to conduct the survey of courses described in the e-mail exchanges, and that her office did not conduct such a survey.]

UPDATE: Wednesday morning, after this article was published without this paragraph, Daniels reached out to Inside Higher Ed to discuss the AP article. He said that his concern about Zinn was appropriate because elementary and secondary school teachers were taking professional development courses at public universities that could have been teaching Zinn's work, and he did not want these teachers -- and their students -- exposed to "falsifications" of history. He said that there was "no implication for academic freedom" from his inquiries, and that no efforts were made to stop Zinn from being taught in higher education, despite what he characterized as a few e-mail messages that he had long forgotten about before the AP article. "If Howard Zinn had been a tenured professor on this campus, I would have defended anything he would have
wanted to write, but not to be immune from criticism," Daniels said, adding that "no one credible defended his versions of history, and neither does academic freedom confer an entitlement to have one's work used in the k-12 public system."

While Zinn was dead when Daniels sought to have his books no longer taught, another target of the governor remains very much alive. He is Charles Little, a professor of education at Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis and a frequent critic of Daniels's education policies. In a 2009 e-mail, the AP reported, Daniels asked that Little's program be audited and potentially cut from receiving state funds. Little did not respond to an e-mail message from Inside Higher Ed seeking comment.

The AP has now released the e-mails' texts, [5] which include swipes at the National Endowment for the Humanities (for sponsoring a seminar where Zinn's works were discussed) and at Indiana University. One Daniels adviser wrote during the exchanges that "this is why my children will not go to IU."

But while the e-mail exchanges included such bashing of Indiana University, they did not note that Purdue -- where Daniels is now president -- actually has taught Zinn as well, at least per our search of the university's website. Two chapters of A People's History can be found on a fall 2010 English course syllabus [6] and three chapters are on a syllabus for a study abroad program in Honduras. [7]

Professors took to Twitter Tuesday night to express outrage. Among the comments: "Who better to run a university than someone who despises the entire concept?" and "I'd never assign Howard Zinn, but I'd fight like heck to preserve my right to assign him."

No Apologies for Teaching Zinn

One professor who teaches Zinn's People's History every year -- and who intends to go on doing so -- is Robert J. Helfenbein, director of the Center for Urban and Multicultural Education at Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis. In an interview Tuesday night with Inside Higher Ed, Helfenbein said he was "shocked and concerned" that a governor could be trying to dictate which works are taught by professors.

Helfenbein also said that Daniels was overstating the extent to which Zinn's ideas pervade schools and colleges. He teaches Zinn in a course for future secondary teachers in social studies. Most of the students are undergraduates, and the vast majority have never heard of Zinn and relatively few are familiar with his ideas, Helfenbein said.

"Part of what I try to teach future social studies teachers is multiple perspectives of history, so even those who disagree with it see a worth in reading a historian take on this very different perspective" from what they have learned before. He said that students write a "reaction paper" to Zinn, and that grading is based on the reasoning and writing, not whether they endorse Zinn. "They can agree with it, disagree with it, agree with some sections and not others, and if they argue well, they get an A," he said. Students tend to emerge with a range of views on Zinn's take on history, he said.

Helfenbein said teachers need to be comfortable teaching books with a range of views, and not fear that they have to ban those they disagree with, or that the governor doesn't like. "I think these e-mails show a massive over-reach of political power in trying to say what teachers should teach and what academic freedom is about in higher education," he said. Faculty members at Purdue, he said, "should be very, very concerned."

Links:
### Rubric for evaluating “From Diaries to Digital Footprints: The Changing Nature of Primary Sources in the Digital Age”

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<th>Exceptional</th>
<th>Admirable</th>
<th>Adequate</th>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction, thesis, &amp; conclusion:</strong></td>
<td>Intro provides context for the rest of the paper, thesis is explicit and clear, conclusion recasts thesis and provides cohesion to the whole paper.</td>
<td>Intro provides some context for the rest of the paper, thesis is implicitly stated but may be unclear or lack an ambitious assertion, conclusion reiterates thesis with little acknowledgement of the rest of paper.</td>
<td>Intro provides little context for the paper, thesis is implicit and hard to find, conclusion makes little reference to thesis.</td>
<td>Intro provides no context for the paper, thesis is not explicit or not present, conclusion does not refer to thesis and does not add to cohesion of paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summaries of the two ideas: Historian’s Craft in the digital age &amp; Digital Footprint</strong></td>
<td>Each issue is summarized clearly with ideas that relate to the thesis.</td>
<td>Summaries could be more clear and succinct, ideas not explicitly related to thesis.</td>
<td>Summaries unclear and haphazard, summaries provide too much or too little information.</td>
<td>Difficult for reader to know which issue is being discussed or summaries are insufficient.</td>
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<td><strong>Synthesis:</strong></td>
<td>Well-selected points of comparison and/or departure among the texts; clearly explained relationships among the texts that support thesis. Clear evidence of higher order thinking, far beyond mere description to include impressive levels of insight.</td>
<td>Points of comparison/departure could be more selective and explicit although the reader can see how the texts are related. Admirable analysis of the topic, though falls a bit short in terms of a truly analytically complex, insightful approach.</td>
<td>Little connection between texts, similarities/differences seem to be randomly selected, difficult for the reader to see how the texts are related. The paper is too descriptive and does not show enough evidence of analysis, insight, and higher order thinking.</td>
<td>No connection is made between texts, no similarities or differences are noted, the reader cannot see how the texts are related, is more summary than synthesis. Very little evidence of insight, analysis, and interpretation. The paper is mere description, and weak at that.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Organization and Coherence:</strong></td>
<td>Logical order of summaries and synthesis, transitions create a clear &amp; effective flow throughout the paper.</td>
<td>Order of summaries and synthesis could be better organized, some transitions aid the flow, but not expertly.</td>
<td>Sequence of summary and synthesizing points makes sense in some of the paper, but not all; transitions are rarely or awkwardly used.</td>
<td>Paragraphs seem to be out of order and haphazard; no transitions to aid the flow.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mechanics:</strong></td>
<td>Impeccable spelling, grammar, word order, word choice, punctuation.</td>
<td>Very few errors in spelling, grammar, word usage, and punctuation.</td>
<td>Several errors in spelling, grammar, word usage, and punctuation.</td>
<td>Many errors in spelling, grammar, word usage, and punctuation.</td>
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