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"Are We Supposed to be the Guy on the Horse?" A Case Study on the Use of Political Cartoons in the American History Classroom

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"Are We Supposed to be the Guy on the Horse?" A Case Study on the

Use of Political Cartoons in the American History Classroom

by

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Abstract

Recent reports on the media saturation experienced by the twenty-first century student have brought about an increased interest in focusing attention on the issue of visual literacy in today's schools. Concepts such as instructional personalization, where approaches to curriculum design and instruction are created to concentrate on the individual strengths of the learner, have been promoted by some as a path to improving overall student performance. Many believe that the content of the Social Studies classroom easily lends itself to a visually stimulating approach and as such is an ideal laboratory to test hypotheses on such an approach. This study examines the use of one such visual tool in the Social Studies content arena, the political cartoon. Political cartoons are believed to be ideally suited to appeal to the visually oriented characteristics of the millennial student in the form of a potentially content rich primary source document. Described within the pages of this paper are the unique experiences with using political cartoons from the perspective of both middle school American History students and their teacher. The qualitative data uncovered through the collection of these experiences clearly illustrates a

noticeable disparity between teacher and student experiences with cartoons from the present and their counterparts from the past. While present day cartoons covering various recent events in the news elicited an impressive level of informational recall and personal connections to the topics covered, the results were considerably less spectacular when political cartoons from the distant past were utilized. Those older images were more difficult for the students to grasp the artist's intent and failed as an opportunity for the students to demonstrate their mastery of content knowledge. It was concluded through an examination of interviews from both teacher and student that the differences observed between the older and newer images may be a function of several factors. Chief among these possible explanations from the point of view of the student was the lifelong collection of experiences that each child brought with them to the process of analyzing a political cartoon. The unique cultural capital possessed by each student as a result of their daily, almost nonstop exposure to all forms of media created a personal connection to the modern material that could not be matched by the content from the past. It was also revealed to be possible that a portion of the blame for the difficulties experienced with the materials from the past could be the result of the day to day decisions made by this one particular classroom teacher. The time and dedication to the mastery of the

content knowledge and procedural skills necessary to decipher political cartoons from the past may have been insufficient to the task at hand. Conclusions drawn from the information collected in these interviews focus on decreasing the discrepancy between the two forms of visual material by taking steps that include considerable work on the part of the teacher and student to improve upon the background content knowledge and processing skills necessary to consistently decipher the information contained within the political cartoons. Such steps may prove to be impractical given the nature of the already jam-packed curriculums and time-strapped teachers that populate today's Social Studies classrooms. Additional studies would be necessary to determine if the experiences viewed here are common to those encountered in other parts of the nation or if they are indeed uniquely characteristic of this one situation. Accordingly, the results of those additional studies would possibly initiate a reevaluation of the conclusions drawn here.

Chapter 1

Overview

Introduction

      Somewhere in the heartland of America, the silence of a quiet evening at home is interrupted by the sound of a ringing telephone. After a brief introduction and an explanation from the caller, the man who answered the phone begrudgingly agrees to participate in a survey. His first question for the survey seems altogether innocuous. In this initial query he is asked to correctly name all five family members from the FOX network's animated television show "The Simpsons". Without any semblance of hesitation, he quickly rattles off the names of each one of the members of the jaundiced cartoon family. The names of the parents come first to his mind - Homer and Marge. Next the names of the children (Bart, Lisa, and Maggie) roll quickly off his tongue. In an attempt to impress his inquisitor he additionally lists the names of the family pets, Snowball and Santa's Little Helper, as well as the children's grandfather, Abe and several other noteworthy Springfield denizens. Before he is able to finish

proudly patting himself on the back in honor of his correct responses, he is faced with the survey's second question. This one causes him a considerably greater amount of difficulty than the first. In this second question put forth by the caller, he is asked to identify each of the five freedoms that are guaranteed to all American citizens by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. He struggles for what must have seemed like an eternity, eventually identifying the Freedom of Speech. Additional moments, some filled with significantly awkward segments of silence, pass before the man correctly adds Freedom of the Press and Freedom of Religion to his list of answers. It is at this moment that his response goes horribly awry. He next adds the right to drive a car, to own a pet, and the right to vote before he finally gives up the task, realizing that his responses were not as accurate as he would have liked them to have been.

The scene described here, while solely the creation of the author's imagination, is not entirely fictional. It recounts a reasonably possible scenario from a survey conducted by the McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum in January of 2006. Based on the surveys conducted by telephone interviews on a random selection of one thousand American adults, it would seem that Americans are more knowledgeable of pop culture than they are of their country's history

and the workings of their own national government. Statistics from the report show that only one of the one thousand Americans surveyed (less than 1%) could correctly identify all five freedoms from the First Amendment (Speech, Press, Peaceful Assembly, Religion, and Redress of Grievances). For the sake of comparison, 22% of survey respondents were able to correctly identify all five members of the Simpson family (Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa, and Maggie). To validate that the results were not simply a factor of one particular television show's popularity, respondents were asked additional questions relating to popular culture. In those additional items, 24% of those surveyed could name all three judges from "American Idol" and 65% could identify Energizer as the battery that "...keeps going, and going, and going..."

Unfortunately, the McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum report is not alone in its dismal results as it relates to information generally related to the field of Social Studies education. In December of 1999, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni commissioned the Roper organization – The Center for Survey Research and Analysis at the University of Connecticut – to survey current college seniors from the top fifty-five liberal arts colleges and research universities as identified within the pages of the U.S. News & World Report's annual college

rankings. Questions for the survey were drawn from a range of topics generally agreed upon as being universal in high school Social Studies curricula across the nation. The results from this survey were similarly less than stellar. Fewer than 25% could correctly identify James Madison as one of the Founding Fathers and his contributions towards writing the U.S. Constitution. Slightly more than half knew any general information about the U.S. Constitution at all. Only one-third could select George Washington as the leader of American military forces during the American Revolution. Just 22% were able to correctly identify "Government of the people, by the people, for the people" as a line from Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, inarguably one of the most important documents underlying the American system of government (Neal 2000). Countless other abysmal examples filled the pages of the report. Over all, more than 80% of the college seniors questioned received survey scores equivalent to a D or an F. A survey conducted in 2001 by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement, also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) or the Nation's Report Card, found similar appalling results in high school students at the twelfth grade level. According to that report, 57% of high school seniors fell below the level of 'basic' in their historical knowledge (Lapp 2002). In no other core subject assessed by the NAEP did more than

half of these same students register below this level. This trend of academic underperformance has continued to disappoint educational observers with its results since the first published findings in 1994. In the 2010 version of the NAEP report 55% of high school seniors fell below the 'basic' achievement level, including an average scale score that has improved by a whopping two points since 1994, illustrating that very little has changed in student performance in the area of Social Studies education.

Not all of the data gathered from this list of surveys was negative. Take for instance the Roper survey conducted in 1999. While the subjects surveyed may have received a poor or failing grade as a measure of their intelligence in the area of American history, they received an A+ for their knowledge and skills in the area of contemporary pop culture. In the very same survey where America's college seniors could not consistently identify important historical figures such as George Washington, James Madison, Abraham Lincoln or their contributions to our nation's past, better than 97% of those same college seniors could correctly identify the cartoon characters Beavis and Butthead as well as the rap artist Snoop Doggy Dogg (Neal 2000). Most would read this preceding piece of statistical data and consider it the final nail in the coffin of Social Studies education. They

would rail against the current societal and political trends that have led the U.S. to these circumstances. Rather than joining the chorus in a chant of 'the sky is falling', some in the field of education instead chose to avail themselves of the opportunity afforded by this collection of data to examine the situation from a significantly different point of view.

Background/Rationale

"...The situation is serious and sad. And it is quite real, let there be no mistake. It has been coming on for a long time, like a creeping disease, eating away at the national memory. While the clamorous popular culture races on, the American past is slipping away, out of sight and out of mind. We are losing our story, forgetting who we are and what it's taken to come this far... Our school systems, the schools we are responsible for, could rightly be charged with educational malpractice." (McCullough, 1995)

The results of the McCormick survey are symptomatic of a much larger problem. The problem involves our notions of historical/social studies knowledge and the manner in which this knowledge is passed

on to future generations. Author David McCullough, in his acceptance speech at the 1995 National Book Award banquet, addressed this problem in the quote above. While many appear to agree with McCullough that the problems illustrated by the McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum survey and others can be laid at the feet of the educational system, there is a great deal of diversity in the litany of suggestions as to how this problem can potentially be remedied. The project to be described in this paper sought to examine one such potential remedy. The solution examined was the use of visual media in the history classroom, specifically the use of political cartoons to assist middle school students in gaining a better understanding about specific American History content.

In establishing the potential value the political cartoon possess in improving overall instruction, two notable studies stood out among the rest. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) performed the first study, *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution*. The NASSP study was published in 1996 with the goal of identifying areas in the educational system that, if improved upon, would allow America's schools to promote consistent, high achievement for all students. In their report, the NASSP offered several recommendations to improve upon the currently perceived

abysmal condition of the education system. The recommendations were classified into six major themes. The recommendation that relates most directly to the processes involved in this projects is found in the first of these themes, Personalization. The recommendation from the study stated that, among other things, "Teachers should know and be able to use a variety of strategies and settings that identify and accommodate individual learning styles and engage students" (NASSP, 2004). This notion of instructional personalization was reiterated when the NASSP issued its 2006 follow up, its third in a series, *Breaking Ranks In The Middle.* Having identified curriculum personalization as a potential key to improving instruction, the next logical progression would be to address what form said personalization would take. The second of the two studies to be mentioned here assisted in taking this next step.

Along with a personalized curriculum, many voices in the field of education have called for an increase in authentic instruction. Such instruction would ideally engage students in tasks that closely resemble the challenges faced outside of school (Newman, 1995). To create such authentic instruction, educators would be best served to have a better understanding of the lives of their students. The second study, Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year-olds, provides

such a necessary insight. The study, conducted in 2005 by the Kaiser Family Foundation, clearly illustrated the need for a more visually oriented educational experience based on the media-savvy, technologically saturated characteristics of the youth of today. Political cartoons have been identified as having the potential to tap into this visual acuity. Political cartoons appeal to these visually attuned students due to their ubiquity (see the aforementioned McCormick survey) and because they have long been recognized as powerful and effective primary source documents and communication tools. As a result of their readability and visual immediacy, political cartoons have the ability to appeal to and be understood by a wide-ranging audience. They take the essence of a particular situation or character and distill it into a single or brief series of images, telling a clear story in a way that is masterful, terse — and influential. Murrell (1967) found that, collectively, they are "in essence a vernacular record of the social and political history of a people."

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine and explain the processes used by middle school students in the American History classroom to derive meaning about specific historical content through

the use of political cartoons. Several states have taken the NASSP and Kaiser reports, as well as the clamor for a greater degree of authentic classroom activities, as a clarion call to revamp their methods of instruction and assessment. States such as Florida ("Florida Department of Education" 2008) and Georgia ("Georgia Department of Education" 2011) have in the recent past outlined newly devised curriculum plans to be implemented in the coming years that include the interpretation of political cartoons as a pivotal critical thinking skill students will be expected to master as a part of their end of course assessments. However, for these states to effectively engage the twenty-first century student and experience the positive results that David McCullough and others so desperately wish to see, they will need to better understand how students use the visual tools they will be expected to interpret as a part of their coursework. After having justified the use of visual media (specifically the use of political cartoons) through a thorough review of the available literature, this paper will recount the steps a project that included a series of interviews with teachers and students whose results should provide practitioners in the field of education with the knowledge of how students take the images found in political cartoons and make meaning of them. Armed with an understanding of the higher level, complex processes used by students to make meaning of a political

cartoon, administrators and teachers alike will be better equipped to design authentic classroom instruction that will one day make the results of the McCormick survey a laughable blemish on our nation's past never to be repeated again.

Research Questions

The data collected during this investigation will address the following research questions:

1. How do middle school students describe and assess the materials and activities that are employed throughout their educational experiences in the American History classroom?

2. How do middle school students gain a better understanding of specific historical content through the use of political cartoons?

Research Process

The content knowledge and higher level thought processes used by students to deconstruct and gain a deeper understanding of events from America's history through the use of political cartoons will be

described in this study through a series of in-depth interviews. First to be interviewed were the classroom teachers, selected solely on the basis of their use of political cartoons as well as their willingness to open their classroom to the researcher. These initial interviews served to provide background knowledge and a setting for the researcher's primary objective - the point of view from the student's perspective. The principal data collected came from multiple interviews conducted with a purposeful sample of students in a middle school American History classroom. Originally intended as a report to cover results from a multitude of classrooms on different campuses, the Principal Investigator of this study eventually settled on a case study approach that detailed one particular classroom's experiences with using political cartoons. The selection processes for the teacher and student participants as well as the manner in which this study evolved and was eventually implemented will be described in much greater detail later in the methods section of this paper.

Statement and Analysis of the Problem

"American high schools are obsolete, by obsolete, I don't just mean that our high schools are broken, flawed and underfunded. By obsolete, I mean that our high schools –

even when they are working exactly as designed – cannot

teach our kids what they need to know today." (Gates,

2005)

In February of 2005, Microsoft founder and well-renowned philanthropist Bill Gates addressed the nation's governors at the National Education Summit on High Schools. The quote above from his prepared comments included a rather scathing review of our American educational system. While Gates' comments were specifically targeted at our entire school system's inability to provide America's children with the skills necessary for today's workforce, his statements could easily have been narrowed to focus solely on the field of Social Studies, specifically in the area of American History. In a succession of national news stories, countless government and private organizations have queued up to bemoan the abysmal performance of our school system in its ability to achieve its primary Social Studies related goal as stated by the National Council for the Social Studies – the creation and maintenance of an effective citizenry.

This parade of reports, of which the initially mentioned McCormick survey is a part of, also includes a 2005 Knight Foundation (Chaltain, 2005) survey of student's knowledge on the exact same

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topic - the First Amendment. The Knight Foundation report on the First Amendment, easily recognized as one of the most important features of our nation's past and present, contains far greater statistical data than the McCormick survey but by no means any better results. As part of the survey, researchers from the University of Connecticut interviewed more than one hundred thousand students, eight thousand teachers, and five hundred administrators at five hundred and forty four U.S. high schools over the course of two years. Noteworthy among its statistical findings was that 73% of the students surveyed lacked a significant knowledge and understanding of the chief aspects of the First Amendment. Of those who did have some level of understanding, their opinions were somewhat disturbing. One-third believed that the First Amendment goes too far in the rights that it guarantees. About 50% felt that newspapers and television networks should obtain government approval prior to releasing their stories. The report went on to list additional results, all appropriate to join in the cavalcade of works detailing just how poorly our future citizens are being educated.

Individual researchers and authors have added their own voices to these reports in the form of qualitative analysis about the current situation in Social Studies and American history education. In his work

How Students Learn: History in the Classroom, G. Stanley Hall, when commenting on the state of history education in the U.S., said "... that no subject so widely taught is, on the whole, taught so poorly, almost sure to create a distaste for historical study – perhaps forever." In his book Lies My Teacher Told Me, author James Loewen echoes Hall's sentiments and expands on the notion of the student's distaste for the subject when saying " ... students hate history. When they list their favorite subjects, history invariably comes in last. Students consider history 'the most irrelevant' of twenty-one subjects commonly taught in high school. Bor-r-ing is the adjective they apply to it. When students can, they avoid it... Even when they are forced to take classes in history, they repress what they learn, so every year or two another study decries what our seventeen-year-olds don't know." (Loewen, 1995, p. 12)

It is ironic that Loewen's comments make mention of the myriad of reports touched on earlier that have served to illustrate how our schools appear to be failing in the area of Social Studies and American History education. The ever-increasing mountain of evidence cannot be ignored. Whether it is the McCormick survey and the Knight Foundation with their information about people's knowledge of the First Amendment, the succession of NAEP reports on the general lack

of historical knowledge, or commentaries by the likes of Gates, Hall, and Loewen, it appears rather obvious even to the untrained eye that our system of education in regards to Social Studies education, specifically American History, is in need of some form of repair. As stated previously, this paper seeks to offer a description of one possible solution in an attempt to bring about some measure of improvement. The strategy to be explored in hopes of achieving this improvement involved one classroom teacher's alteration of the traditional teaching methods utilized on a daily basis in classrooms across the nation. Based on the quotes by Hall, Loewen, and those that follow, it would seem to that such alterations are long overdue.

Teacher Effect

> "Insanely tedious, boring as hell, stupid and worthless, the worst, watered down, too general. What do all these descriptions have in common? They describe high school history classes around the country. Perhaps such harsh words are hardly surprising, except that these come from kids who profess to like and enjoy studying history. For most high school students, history is a lot like the multiplication tables: memorizing vast quantities of

seemingly disconnected factoids – unrelieved drudgery except for the occasional, unpromised oasis of a dynamic teacher who asks for something more." (Flemming, 2002)

To delve more deeply into the potential solution to the problem described in the introduction of this paper, an understanding must be obtained as to what created the problem in the first place. The quote above from Flemming (2002) can be found to be useful in accomplishing this preliminary endeavor. When describing the student's general dislike of the subject area, the quote scratches the surface of what appears to be the larger, more serious problem. In commenting on the memorization of "… vast quantities of seemingly disconnected factoids" the author hints that one possible problem with the current system lies in the teaching strategies and presentation methods employed daily by the individual classroom teachers. The author implies that teachers today fail to employ strategies that appeal to the intellect of the twenty-first century student. This idea runs parallel to Hall's earlier comment on the overall poor quality of teaching in the history classroom. While heaving the blame squarely onto the shoulders of the teachers, the author does hold out a glimmer of hope. The "oasis of a dynamic teacher" mentioned in the passage suggests that while teachers may be a significant part of the problem,

they most assuredly have the potential to also serve as the solution. It is one of the assertions of this paper that the personalization of instruction, as previously defined in the NASSP report and illustrated by the teacher whose classroom served as the living laboratory for this project, has the potential to assist other teachers in their search for such a solution in their own classrooms.

Any instructor desiring to establish the "oasis" mentioned in the quoted passage would be best served by spending some time investigating their client base – the students in their classrooms. Only through an understanding of students, their lives, their personalities and their learning abilities can any teacher hope to create an American history curriculum personalized and structured around a collection of authentic skills and content in such a way as to make it more likely to achieve its goal of an effective citizenry. A May 2005 study conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation serves to shed some light on today's students and provide data that may pave the road towards the elusive, long-sought oasis that a personalized curriculum can create.

The Twenty-first Century Student

Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year-olds (2005) was designed to collect data for the purposes of describing the impact that media has had on the current generation of our country's children. While painting a portrait of today's child, a child whose daily life is inundated by visual media, the report also compares them to the children of our nation's past. Roberts, et al. (2005) found at the end of the 1950s, seven of eight U.S. homes (87%) had a TV set and personal computers and video game consoles had not yet been invented. By comparison, 99% of U.S. children at the end of the 20th century lived in homes with a TV set. Of those same children, 60% lived in homes with three or more TVs and over half had a TV in their own bedroom. In all, today's children spend more than five hours a day exposed to various types of visual media.

While comparisons to the 1950s might seem inappropriate, it is important to note that the role of technology has changed dramatically even in the short time since the Generation M report. The Kaiser Foundation repeated their survey and issued a new set of findings in 2010 and the numbers show an exponential growth in daily technology use and media exposure. The five hours a day students spent directly

interacting with media in the first report had grown in the new set of data to more than seven and a half hours each day. Included in that increase was a growth in digital music player possession (which quadrupled), laptop computers (which more than doubled), and cell phone ownership (which doubled). That number of hours spent using these technologies is perhaps even more remarkable when taking into account that researchers did not factor in multitasking with technology (using more than one piece of technology simultaneously), talking on cell phones, or even texting on a cell phone when calculating their results. There seems little reason to believe that this trend in technological saturation while abate any time soon. In fact, it is quite reasonable to assume that these numbers will only continue to increase and possibly at rates even faster than those illustrated here. This relentless electronic saturation will undoubtedly bring with it a steady stream of visual traffic, images that will continue to impact the learning characteristics of students.

By themselves, the statistics provided in this report may seem to have little to do with the problems experienced in American History classrooms across the nation and offer no help in determining a path to instructional personalization. In actuality, it can be surmised that these statistics strike directly at the core of the problem. This report

makes it plainly obvious that the children of today bear little or no resemblance to the children of generations past. As such, it would be reasonable to conclude that the teaching methods found to be effective in the past may no longer have the ability to succeed in today's classrooms. To paraphrase Dr. Spencer Johnson, our 'cheese' has been moved. Much like the characters in Johnson's book, *Who Moved My Cheese?*, school systems must adapt to this new scenario or most assuredly suffer even more severe consequences than the dismal results detailed in the aforementioned reports. But how to react? How can school systems and individual teachers best serve this generation's children? For the one potential solution that was the focus of this project, one can look again to the Kaiser Family Foundation report. The report indicated that one of the significant differences between the children of today and those of past generations is that today's children are more in tune to visual imagery. This notion resonates through the findings of other researchers. Dr. Anne Bamford (2003), Director of Visual Arts from the Art and Design University of Technology in Sydney, Australia, has conducted similar research on visual learning and has concluded, "…contemporary culture has become increasingly dependent on the visual especially for its capacity to communicate instantly and universally" She adds in the same passage, "Pictures exist all around us. They surround us. The economy

relies heavily on visual representation… Understanding pictures is a vital life enriching necessity" (Bamford, p. 2). Charles Brumback (1995), chairman of the Newspaper Association of America, has stated that "the ratio of visual image to text is increasing, and we are heading toward a culture of visual literacy. More and more we will communicate visually and less through text" (Fitzgerald, 1995 as cited in Bamford 2003, p. 2). Armed with this knowledge, it is possible to construct a personalized curriculum and authentic instructional strategies that utilize the student's predisposition to visual stimuli to address the previously described problems of American History education. As will be demonstrated later in these pages, the teacher at the heart of this study attempted to construct such a learning environment through the use of tools such as the political cartoon.

While it would be foolish to conclude that the use of political cartoons by themselves can or will change students feelings about American History or advance their knowledge of the subject matter, it will be detailed here that when combined with an improved pedagogical style intended to address the educational needs of the twenty-first century learner they can be a useful stepping stone on the road to a more successful experience for students in an American History classroom. And the anticipated improvement by the use of

such tools is not just merely the stirrings in the mind of just one classroom teacher. The perceived potential possessed by these images appears to be gaining momentum with others across the nation. As mentioned earlier, several states have begun to reshape their Social Studies curricula to address the needs of today's more visually oriented students, a reshaping that almost universally includes the interpretation of political cartoons within their American history learning expectations. The next chapter of this paper will discuss the history of political cartoons, the impact they have had on our nation's past and the influence they continue to exhibit today. This forthcoming section will also review the literature on the use of cartoons as one type of primary source document as well as other visual media in the field of education, all the while setting the stage for what will eventually be a description of the study that was conducted on the ways students use political cartoons to interpret specific content in the American history classroom.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Preface

At the end of King George's War in 1748, one in a series of colonial conflicts between France and Great Britain, French officials on the continent of North America began the process of establishing a collection of outposts along the Ohio River west of the Allegheny Mountains. The purpose of these outposts was to keep the lucrative fur and trading industries firmly in the hands of the French while stemming the westward expansion plans of the American colonies. The French had always maintained good relations with the Native Americans in the Ohio Valley by respecting their culture and traditions. They now sought to exploit that relationship in what was sure to be another conflict with Britain over the land where these new outposts now stood. The actions by the French greatly concerned the American colonists, most notably Virginia governor Robert Dinwiddie. In the winter of 1753, Dinwiddie sent a young George Washington into the Ohio country to deliver a letter of protest to the French. When

Washington returned with news that the French had refused to leave the area, many in the American colonies began to make preparations for war.

In June of 1754, representatives from most of the northern American colonies and the six Iroquois Nations met in Albany, New York. At this meeting, a plan was discussed to create a single government that would rule over all of the English colonies in North America. Such a government would be able to efficiently organize the efforts necessary to defeat the French and their Native American allies. In the days leading up to the meeting, many sought to persuade the colonists to support this Albany Plan of Union. The most vocal supporter of the plan was also its author: Benjamin Franklin. Franklin, a well-respected colonist widely renowned for his numerous inventions, included publisher among his list of accomplishments. Franklin often used his publications to inform and persuade readers on the issues of the day. His May 9, 1754 issue of the Pennsylvania Gazette contained what was to become a famous image in the history of this nation. The issue included a cartoon, widely recognized as the first political cartoon in American history. The sketch conveyed to the Gazette's readers Franklin's concerns about the French and Indian threat along the western boundaries of the colonies. The image was of

a snake cut into several segments, each labeled with a letter symbolizing the name of an American colony (the colonies of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island are lumped together in this drawing and identified by the letters 'N.E.' - the New England region - to stress colonial unity). Below the snake read the phrase 'Join, or Die.' The meaning of the drawing and axiom are not as threatening as one might interpret from first glance. The symbolism of the cartoon urged the colonists to put aside their individual differences and join together in a strong union capable of defeating their common foe. (Franklin, 1754)
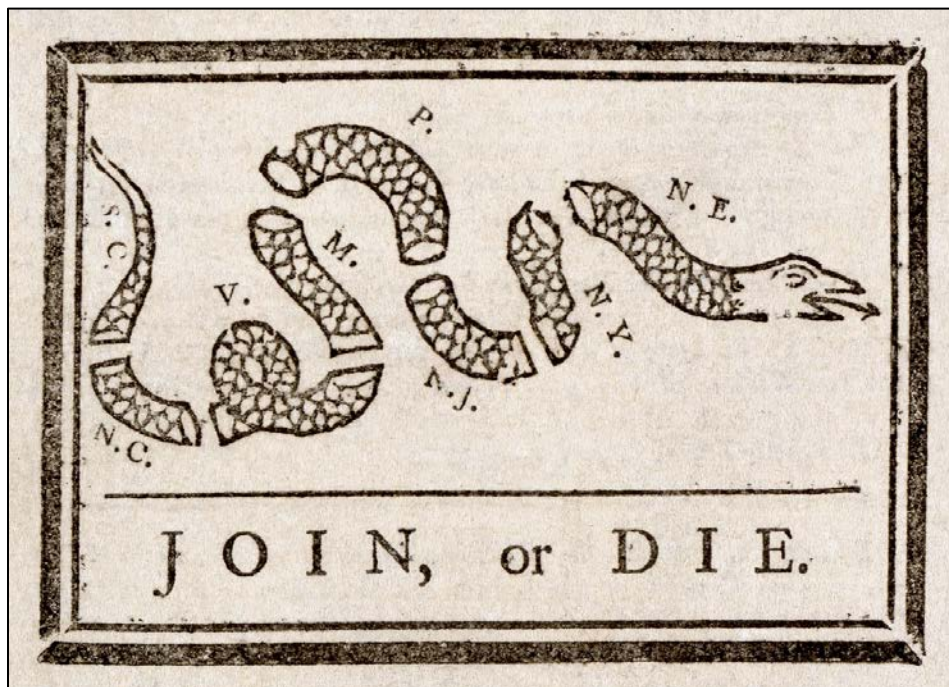
Figure 2.1 'Join, or Die'
Published by Benjamin Franklin (May 9, 1754)

Although Franklin's Albany Plan of Union was never fully adopted, England and the American colonies did defeat the French along with their Native American allies and the rest, as they say, is history. While Franklin's contributions as a publisher during the French and Indian War and the movement toward American independence were significant, his segmented snake was not the origination of the political cartoon. The elements of a political cartoon: caricature, which exaggerates or parodies the person or persons at issue, and allusion, which creates the circumstances into which the person in question is placed, have existed in one form or another since before the age of the Renaissance. They have been successfully utilized throughout American and world history to inform and persuade the masses on a myriad of issues. They have proven time and again to be capable tools of communication, tools whose efficacy reaches beyond the political realm and into the area of education. This paper seeks to shed some light on the use of these images in the classroom by describing the manner in which students use them to better understand events in our nation's history.

Classroom Instruction and the Millennial Student

The National Association of Secondary School Principals, in an effort to address the problems facing education such as the appalling statistics described in the McCormick, NAEP, and Roper reports from the previous chapter, began a process of engaging the nation's educational leaders in a succession of conversations focused on evaluating how well our schools are meeting the needs of each student. In a series of reports (Breaking Ranks, 1996, Breaking Ranks II, 2004, and Breaking Ranks In The Middle, 2006) the organization outlined a multitude of approaches it theorized would stem the tide of our perceived educational decline. Key to this process and mentioned heavily in each of the three reports was the notion of instructional personalization, a design in which content and instruction are structured specifically with the unique needs and learning abilities of the students in mind. Wolfson and Torres (2006) stated that "...by melding the unique developmental characteristics of the young adolescent with the features that define them as a generation,... educators can promote personalization by creating structures where students experience a sense of belonging and ownership of their learning" (Wolfson & Torres, para. 3). By "unique characteristics of a generation", Wolfson and Torres are making a less than subtle

reference to the Millennials that populate our classrooms, a group whose distinctive characteristics are necessary to explore not only for a better understanding of the problems that may exist in education but also for a path toward potential solutions.

The Millennial generation, also known as Generation Y, the Echo Boomers, and Generation Next, are those born in the years between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s. As Wolfson and Torres (2006) noted, this group does possess certain unique generational characteristics. While researchers might disagree on the entirety of that list of characteristics, almost all would agree that this group is marked by an increase in use and familiarity with digital media in all its many forms. This agreement is fully supported by the results of the Kaiser Family Foundation's 2005 Generation M study and the 2010 follow up, both mentioned in the first chapter of this paper. Frey and Birnbaum (2002) found that these millennial students have grown up with and become accustomed to the visual stimulation of television, computers, and video games. As such, they expect similar imagery to be employed effectively and on a regular basis as part of their various learning experiences. The NAEP survey from 2001 addressed the issue of the methods used specifically in Social Studies classrooms across the nation. Based on this report, eighty to ninety percent of students

in the U.S. utilize direct reading from their textbooks as part or all of their classroom lessons on a daily basis. Given the mismatch between the expectations of the current crop of media-savvy students and the actual practices they experience in the classroom on a regular basis, it is little wonder why such dismal figures were uncovered by the Roper and NAEP surveys.

Return for a moment to the tale of Benjamin Franklin and his Pennsylvania Gazette that began this paper. Knowing the need to inform the populace about the dire events that were about to transpire, Franklin surveyed his population and selected a form of communication best suited to the abilities of his audience. While both private and public educational systems did exist in the early American colonies, the basics of literacy were limited to a relatively small segment of the population. Even those who could be counted by today's standard as literate were limited in their literary experiences, mainly reading from the Bible on a regular basis. As such, Franklin chose to use an illustration to convey his desired message. In this case, it appears that a story from America's past holds the potential solution to address the educational needs of the present.

Although the unique generational characteristics of Millennials have been well known for some time, Mbuva (2003) found that the traditional teaching and learning strategies still prevail in most schools. The aforementioned Roper and NAEP survey results support this finding. Based on Mbuva's accounts, the research did have an eye-opening effect on members of the teaching profession. The problem he found is that while teachers generally accepted the notion that today's students required new and different strategies to meet their educational needs, there was little or no follow up to instruct teachers on the methods that would be needed to implement the necessary changes in their classrooms. Lacking the guidance and support that this follow up would have provided, the teachers appear to have fallen back on the one approach they knew best, the one that they themselves had experienced the most – the tried and true practice of the lecture. Miller's (2001) point of view is congruent with Mbuva's conclusions and offers a framework for the implementation of an approach geared towards the specific needs of students. To address the needs of a diverse classroom, she emphasizes the importance of first identifying the unique learning circumstances of the students. Once identified, subsequent instruction would include appropriate adaptations geared towards the areas identified. Several action research projects report findings that in fact illustrate the conclusions

of Mbuva and Miller. French, et al. (1998), Burhorn, et al. (1999), Gohlinghorst & Wessels (2001), George, et al. (2001), and Herbe, et al. (2002) all reported a significant positive impact on student motivation, attitude, and achievement when instruction was altered to meet the unique needs of a given group of students. Each of these reports support the notion of personalized instruction put forth by the Breaking Ranks reports, that classroom teaching strategies directly correlated to the distinctive learning characteristics of the students will result in improved overall achievement. While many of these reports do not specifically deal with Social Studies instruction, the conclusions drawn can easily be applied to the American History classroom.

Visual Literacy

The unique learning characteristics of each generation's students are not the only items in the field of education that are in a constant state of flux. Educational terms once thought of as concrete in their meaning have also experienced a change over time. One such term is literacy. For an unusually long period of time this term remained static, referring simply to one's ability to read, write, and analyze the different forms of print media. These traditional literacy skills, focusing on interactions between a single student, pen and paper, and a

tangible text, continue to dominate the classroom, especially in the age of high stakes testing (Barnwell, 2009). But as the unique learning characteristics of the millennial students begin to permeate the structure of our nation's schools, the definition of literacy has begun to experience a change. Seglem and Witte (2009) discussed this change in commenting on the visual symbols that dominate the world today, symbols that require more complex thinking than generally associated with the long-established understanding of literacy mentioned here. This saturation of visual symbols and the associated skills that would inevitably accompany it gave rise to an expansion of the traditional vernacular and, as such, a new term arose - visual literacy. While this entire process may appear to be a more recent phenomenon, the term 'visual literacy' was actually first coined by Jack Debes in 1969. At that time he provided the following definition:

"Visual Literacy refers to a group of vision-competencies a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences. The development of these competencies is fundamental to normal human learning. When developed, they enable a visually literate person to discriminate and interpret the visible actions, objects, symbols, natural or man-made,

that he encounters in his environment. Through the creative use of these competencies, he is able to communicate with others. Through the appreciative use of these competencies, he is able to comprehend and enjoy the masterworks of visual communication." (Debes, 1969. p. 27)

While Debes' definition provided an adequate launching point on the topic at the time it was offered it is clear that there is no way he could have imagined the changes we have experienced over time and the degree to which visual images have come to dominate in our society. This societal evolution has even included a reexamination of Debes' initial definition of visual literacy. Over time, some felt that his phrasing was too broadly stated. Others prefer more succinct definitions such as the one proffered by Braden and Hortin (1982). Their definition states that "Visual literacy is the ability to understand and use images, including the ability to think, learn, and express oneself in terms of images." (Braden & Hortin, 1982, p. 37).

In addition to the generational adaptations to terms such as literacy, educational terms can be altered further over time by their use in specific subject areas. In the case of Social Studies, especially

with regards to American History, visual literacy has over time primarily involved the interpretation of topical maps, graphs, historic photographs and paintings, etc. in conjunction with the more traditional classroom texts to promote a better understanding of the content being studied. The use of these materials allows students to utilize a plethora of skills, drawing on information from a variety of sources just like historians do in reaching conclusions on the meaning and significance of the historical events they are studying. These tasks, involving students in directly analyzing and interpreting historical information - what authors such as Wineburg (2001) refer to as 'doing history' - are key to the notions of authentic instruction that many have sought to increase in the twenty-first century classroom. This increased emphasis can be seen in the evolution of individual state education standards, such as the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards from Florida as well as the other states mentioned in chapter one.

George Lucas, in a 2004 interview with *edutopia.org* contributor James Daly, stated "If students aren't taught the language of… images, shouldn't they be considered as illiterate as if they left college without being able to read or write?" (Daly, 2004, para. 7) Mr. Lucas' comments echo the thoughts of many educators today; that an

amount of emphasis should be placed on visual literacy equal to that which continues to be placed on the more traditional view of what it is to be literate. In spite of what appears to be a near unanimous consent concerning the inundation and subsequent power visual images possess within education as well as society as a whole, Pauwels (2008) finds that this phenomenon has been met with a noticeable level of societal neglect and a lack of emphasis in fostering the visual competencies necessary to take full advantage of the situation. To facilitate a greater emphasis and to improve on the utilization of the skills of visual literacy in any educational setting, it would seem to be in the best interest of the classroom teacher to attempt to achieve a better understanding of the processes students use in analyzing and interpreting the myriad visual images that cross their paths on any given day. Keith Barton has done a great deal of work in this area, adding thoughts and concepts that have contributed immensely to the notion of visual literacy and the use of imagery in the process of learning history. While most of his work involves the interpretation of historical photographs, the concepts and skills he addresses in his work are applicable for any number of visual materials that could be brought into the social studies classroom. Primary to many of the conclusions drawn by Barton is his notion that visual materials, particularly those that include people, have a greater

capacity to engage today's students than do activities based solely on oral or written language. This concept is echoed by others such as Seglem and Witt (2009) who have supported the critical thinking skills necessary in the interpretation of visual stimuli across a multitude of curricula. While using historical photographs with students, Barton found that the students genuinely enjoy looking at the images, talking about them, and making repeated attempts to decipher what is happening in them. With that educational 'hook' firmly emplaced, Barton goes on to expand on the capacity these activities have to address a variety of historical skills. These skills involve using clues to place images within specific historical context, making comparisons between past and present, describing historical changes in terms of cause and effect, and students developing their own historical questioning skills. Each and every one of these skills, brought about through the use of activities centered on the ideas encompassing the notion of visual literacy, represent the rigorous and authentic instruction that many believe are necessary for improving American history instruction.

Political Cartoons

While Barton's work with photographs represents a treasure trove of information on effective instruction utilizing visual literacy, photographs are by no means the only visual medium that can be used to improve a student's knowledge and skills in the field of American history. The focus of this project, political cartoons, has been found to possess at the very least an equal amount of potential in their capacity to serve as an effective tool in the social studies classroom. As mentioned previously, the elements of political cartoons have a history that can be traced to a period of time before the age of the Renaissance. While there is contradictory information as to the exact origins of this type of artistic expression, noteworthy examples can be found throughout the early histories of the Mediterranean and northern regions of the European continent. One of the more memorable uses of these cartoons was during the 16th century by Martin Luther and his followers in decrying the presumed unseemly practices of the Roman Catholic Church and, ultimately, the launching of the Protestant Reformation. This European tradition of cartooning traveled with the early settlers as they ferried themselves across the Atlantic Ocean on their way to the New World. Just as was the case in European history, detailed instances exist of the use of cartoons during each and every

pivotal point in early American history. Starting with Benjamin Franklin's French and Indian War era divided snake and encompassing such poignant issues as the removal of Native Americans, Slavery, and women's rights, political cartoons have been there to illustrate and retell our nation's history from a collection of widely ranging points of view. From the famous images of Thomas Nast and Tammany Hall all the way up to and including the razor-sharp observations of the cartoonists of today, political cartoons continue to provide educators with a variety of images on timely issues presented in a manner that reaches virtually every segment of American society.

Diamond (2002) observed that political cartoons have not been fully embraced by academia as a whole, resulting in what he perceives as a small and noticeably dated amount of academic literature on the subject as it directly relates to their use in the American History classroom. The continued dearth of research today bears out his findings. He attributes this lack of acceptance and research to the fact that the topic of political cartoons overlaps several disciplines. This overlapping nature of political cartoons yields studies widely ranging from the use of cartoons in the interpretation of humor, their impact on the results of presidential elections, and the evolution of social power in the former British colonies on the continent of Africa. The

resulting limited research on the usefulness of these cartoons in the area of history education has yielded both anecdotal and empirical data from studies that have employed a variety of methods. The anecdotal information gathered from this research for the most part paints a very positive picture as to the potential political cartoons can have in the classroom. Steinfirst (1995) states that political cartoons can be used with young people to accomplish a wide variety of educational goals. Among these goals she cites the ability the cartoons have to assist children in operating at higher cognitive levels through creative and critical thinking. Steinfirst is especially keen on the likely ability political cartoons have to raise the relevance level of politics and current events for today's students. This ability is paramount, as Steinfirst lists an involved citizenry as the most important of our society's educational and democratic goals. Sulsona (2004) in writing for The Detroit Free Press' Newspapers in Education program as well as the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists echoes the sentiments of Steinfirst. She states "My goal was to somehow get the students to think in a more advanced way about current events and to make connections to both the past and the present." Towards that goal, she began to utilize political cartoons on a regular basis in her Social Studies classroom. To explain the effectiveness the cartoons had towards reaching her objective, she further commented that, "…at

the beginning of the year most students knew very little about life outside of our small rural county. Today most can carry on meaningful conversations about America's past, present, and potential future." Beckford (2010) agrees with this positive sentiment associated with the use of political cartoons. His work drew him to a conclusion that political cartoons can interest students in ways that a textbook cannot. He additionally noted that understanding the cartoons in an American History context forced students to develop a stronger recognition that historical understandings are complex, debatable, and based on a multitude of historical sources. In all, the variety of anecdotal evidence (albeit limited) would suggest that the use of political cartoons in the secondary Social Studies classroom would most definitely produce positive results in the areas of student motivation and achievement.

While the anecdotal evidence provides rave reviews of the potential educational value of political cartoons, a number of action research projects offer evidence that paints a picture considerably less rosy. In each of the following instances, the researcher or classroom teacher experienced frustration and failure when attempting to use political cartoons in the classroom. Shafer (1930) found that a large segment of his students had difficulty understanding the cartoons he used. Brinkman (1968) and Carl (1968) also questioned the ability of

students and even adults to comprehend this editorial art form. Carl's study in particular yielded dismal results. In his study, only fifteen percent of respondents understood the cartoonist's desired message. In continuing this trend, Bedient and Moore (1985) stated that "Numerous interpretations were incorrect and many cartoons were not even interpreted." These findings reinforced the data collected earlier by Bedient alone (1971). Just as in his work with Moore, Bedient found that participants in his study could not consistently understand the cartoon's message. The broken record plays on with the findings of DeSousa and Medhurst (1982). Their research came to the same conclusions as the others and stated that the viewers of the cartoons could not "decode the graphic messages in line with the cartoonist's intent."

While a cursory reading of this research would make it seem that a teacher using political cartoons in his or her classroom would be guaranteed failure, a closer examination illustrates some possible flaws with their results. In reviewing each of the studies that presented this depressing information, Heitzman (1998) found that the problem in each situation most likely lay in the processes used in the classroom rather than the cartoons themselves. Heitzman in part bases this assumption on another study on the usefulness of political cartoons. In

this study, Hunter, Moore, and Sewell (1991) found that for cartoons to be effective "the individual must have the knowledge base to be able to interpret the cartoons." Kleeman (2006) similarly discussed the need to develop skills in the classroom for a successful implementation of political cartoons; a knowledge of the context to which the cartoon refers, an ability to recognize the visual elements used by a cartoonists to convey an opinion, the capacity to discern the cartoonist's perspective, and the student's ability to construct their own opinion on the topic in question. It is the assertion of Heitzman that the researchers mentioned earlier reached their negative outcomes because they failed to first impress upon their students these skills as well as those Barton described in his work with historical photographs as necessary to properly dissect cartoons or any other visual materials. Without this skill set, a set sure to be useful in more than just the American History classroom, it is little wonder that these projects yielded these dreadful results. Additional suppositions can be made that may help to explain the findings of these researchers. First, the studies in question are rather dated, with some more than forty years old. The importance of visual stimulation identified earlier by Frey and Birnbaum and touted as a rationale for the use of political cartoons by others is a relatively recent phenomenon associated with the millennial generation. Minix (2004) illustrates this point by directly

associating the power of political cartoons with their ability to tap into

the visual elements of popular culture (i.e., television, Hollywood films,

etc.). Also, since the vast majority of these investigations were

conducted prior to the publication of the many studies mentioned in

this section the researchers in question cannot have benefited from

their findings. It is reasonable to assume that these researchers did

not first assess the characteristics of their generationally-unique

students. As such, it is possible that the participants in these studies

did not have learning strengths similar to the visually leaning students

of today. If the participant's strengths lied elsewhere, the intended

goal of these visual stimuli would have fallen on proverbial deaf ears.

A similar mismatch of skills and classroom strategies can be presumed

to be at fault for the poor results on the Roper and other surveys

mentioned earlier in the first chapter of this paper.

Primary Source Documents

In addition to their obvious capacity to tap into the visual

modality that seems to dominate the lives of today's students, political

cartoons possess the potential as primary source documents to lessen

the stranglehold that textbooks have in today's history classrooms.

Referring once again to the NAEP survey, in no other core subject area

does the textbook exert such a level of dominance over what is taught than in the Social Studies classroom. While Wakefield (2006) found that regular use of the textbook did improve basic knowledge of history, he also asserted that the same overuse of textbooks failed in assisting students in the development of a deeper understanding of the content. In their study of the difficulties faced by history teachers new to the profession, van Hover and Yeager (2004) explained one possible reason as to why the textbook has risen to its current level of prominence. In their work, the researchers listed multiple preparations, a lack of institutional support, additional duties outside of the classroom, limited resources, issues with classroom discipline, professional isolation, inadequate salaries, high parent expectations, unfamiliarity with routines and procedures, and a mismatch between expectations of teaching and the realities of the classroom as just some of the hurdles faced daily by new teachers. The researchers found that these difficulties had a direct impact on the methods teachers utilized on a day to day basis in their classrooms. Teachers who in college had demonstrated a proficiency in the use of creativity in lesson planning and presentation had now reverted to a heavier emphasis on more 'traditional' methods of instruction, most notably an overreliance on the classroom textbook.

To achieve a deeper understanding of American History beyond what is found in the textbook many researchers advocate constructing knowledge of history by using primary sources, employing the steps of historical inquiry, and creating an educational environment that encourages students to think critically about history. It is through this process that the goals of both the National History Standards and the National Council for the Social Studies, specifically for students to engage in historical thinking beyond the basic facts of their textbooks by examining the historical record for themselves and thereby ultimately creating a more effective citizenry, may be achieved. While these goals, as well as goals set forth by other organizations, vary in the approach they employ to achieve these goals, one factor they all have in common is the use of primary sources to supplement the sometimes limited information found in American History textbooks.

Tally and Goldenberg (2005), while studying the use of digitized primary sources in middle and high school history classes, developed several conclusions that support the use of primary source documents. Notable among the findings was that the documents gave the students a true sense of the complexities found in history, a notion very different from the sometimes banal qualities derived from the pages of a textbook. It is through these complexities that students developed

an understanding of the multiple perspectives that foster an environment more conducive to critical thinking and ultimately a deeper understanding of the true nature of history. In his book Teaching What Really Happened, James Loewen offers the example of a textbook used in the southern portion of the United States to illustrate the problems of an overreliance on textbooks in an American History classroom. The subject Loewen examined was the Civil War, or more precisely how the textbook dealt with the causes of the war. Not wanting to offend the sensibilities of its current (and hopefully future) customers, Loewen points out that the writers of the textbook muddy the causes of the war, placing slavery as far down on what appears to be an ever-growing list as possible. While Loewen admits that the causes of the war are subject to debate, the creators of the textbook go out of their way to make sure that said debate never takes place within its pages. They state the reasons for the war, or at least their version of the reasons, as concrete facts not to be challenged by the reader. In this one example, we see that the creation of a US History textbook is becoming more often a work of political compromises at the expense of what may ultimately be our national identity. This competition of priorities and agendas combined with the limited space that a textbook can offer without crushing the spines of the young students that carry them from class to class on a daily basis very often

leaves the final product fragmented, incoherent, and somewhat lacking in the content and materials students need to develop the deeper understanding of history that should be the ultimate goal of any course (Patrick, 2002). This example of the many different views on the causes of the Civil War provides the ideal opportunity to illustrate the usefulness of primary sources. Rather than rely on a textbook that has been expunged of any potentially inflammatory or controversial points of view, why not go directly to the source when determining the causes of the Civil War? If a student wants to know why South Carolina, the first state to secede, left the Union, why not just read the materials they left behind? An examination of South Carolina's declaration of secession, if introduced and used properly within the context of a history classroom, can provide students with the information they need to decide for themselves the causes of the Civil War. It is through the use of such materials and the accompanying process involved that a deeper understanding of history can be attained.

While it seems that the use of primary sources can be generally agreed upon by the research, the decision as to what type of documents are most appropriate for the classroom is not quite as clear. As with the list of difficulties facing classroom teachers, the

various types of primary source documents is a long list and each of the items on that list is worthy of its own detailed investigation. For the purposes of this proposal, the political cartoon will be placed prominently at the top of that list. This placement is not to assert that political cartoons, the various images drafted to inform as well as persuade by artists experiencing historic events first hand, hold a position of superiority over the other forms a primary source document may take (i.e., photographs, diaries, music, etc.). The assertion made here is simply that the political cartoon, while possessing a history much older than that of the United States, nevertheless holds a very special place in the collective psyche of the American people. Bill Mauldin's iconic image of Abraham Lincoln weeping at the news of John F. Kennedy's assassination, Herbert Block's scathing pieces on Richard Nixon's presidency and the Watergate scandal (Nixon was repeatedly quoted as saying "I… hate to have to get up in the morning and look at his cartoons."), there are numerous examples of political cartoons in American History that could be utilized in the classroom and each of them is deserving of the timeless adage 'a picture is worth a thousand words.' As Parker (2000) commented, these cartoons, especially those from major events such as presidential elections, provide scholars and students alike a glimpse of public opinion and political debate surrounding the events of the past. They allow the

reader to firmly place their finger on the pulse of society in a way that the written word sometimes fails. Whether to promote the status quo, raise awareness of a societal issue, or to nudge the citizenry towards change, political cartoons have changed the face of history. Even the cartoons dealing with lesser-known or more local events can propel the reader to a unique time and place, providing a better understanding of life in a particular period of time. While experts such as Daryl Cagle (2005) have identified the cartoonists of today as having considerably more liberal leanings, political cartoons across the timeline provide the multiple perspectives Tally and Goldberg spoke of. With that multitude of perspectives, teachers have in their possession a tool that can potentially lessen the 'tyranny of the textbook' and stem the tide of bad news that began this discussion.

Interpreting Political Cartoons

There appears to be a sufficient amount of evidence concerning the educational value of political cartoons in the American history classroom as a useful instructional device in an ever increasing visually engaged society to assume this to be a solid, valid assertion. Even those reluctant to accept such a suggestion cannot deny the increased appearance of political cartoons over the years in the grade level

expectations of various state departments of education across the nation (see Appendix A for an excerpt of the Florida standards). Regardless of one's stance on the topic, there still exist questions that need to be addressed concerning these visual tools. Most notable among these questions, according to Ford (2010), involves the determination if the students of the Millennial generation can grasp the visual information they are presented and also an understanding of how they interpret those visuals. To phrase it another way we need to better understand how, within the context of an American history classroom, does a student become visually literate? Any classroom teacher desirous of improving on the dismal statistics outlined in chapter one of this paper would be most interested in a response to such a question. It is not enough simply to know that today's students think differently, teachers must also know how they think.

While a minority of researchers such as Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) have suggested that students can and often do learn how to utilize and interpret visuals with very little help, an overwhelming number agree with Abilock's (2003) position that advocates well defined instruction and guidance for students to maximize their experiences with visual materials so that they may become visually literate and ultimately critical thinkers. Specifically relating to the topic

of political cartoons, the previously mentioned work of Kleeman and Heitzman would support Abilock in defining a specific knowledge base and skill set that would need to be introduced and at least partially mastered for a successful implementation of political cartoons in the American history classroom. The knowledge base spoken of here refers to the relevant information concerning specific periods of times in our nation's history. Using Benjamin Franklin's segmented serpent again as an example, there exists a set collection of informational knowledge that a student would need to be in possession of to maximize their experience in using the cartoon to gain a better understanding of this period in history. Said information would include an understanding of European land claims in North America as a result of the age of exploration, the expansion of said land claims by the French crown and the establishment of military forts in the Ohio Valley as well as the ensuing English objection, the events of the engagement between Lieutenant Colonel George Washington and the denizens of Fort Necessity against French forces at the Battle of Jumonville Glen, and the subsequent attempts by Franklin and others to unite the individual colonial governments in preparation for the perceived inevitable war with France - an effort culminating with the miserable failure of the Albany Plan of Union. It is important to note that content specific information such as this can and should maintain a paramount position

of importance in American history instruction regardless of the strategies used by teachers.

In addition to the background content knowledge that any student would require to make meaning of political cartoons from specific periods in America's history, there exists a set of skills necessary to develop applicable not only to political cartoons but to all forms of visual materials used in the classroom. Expanding on these skills in the classroom would be necessary to develop a student's visual literacy. Norman (2010) identifies these comprehension processes in a series of sequential steps that although not originally developed for use with political cartoons can easily be applied to the process of analyzing these historical tools. The first in these steps is a literal description of the object(s) in the image without any attempt at an interpretation of the author's/artist's intent. The next action in the process involves the identification and understanding of any labels, captions, or other features the graphic's creator may have included. It is important to note here that not all images may contain such graphical features and therefore, in some instances, this part of the process may be unnecessary. Once the literal interpretation and identification of graphical features has taken place the more in depth portion of the comprehension process may begin. This more in depth

portion begins with inferential descriptions made by the student observer. These descriptions require the reader to gather implied information from the graphic that is not explicitly depicted. The inferences made here most often will require connections to be made with any text, for example a passage in a book on an accompanying page that may be included with the image. The text that might go along with the image to be interpreted could also be included in the next stage of the comprehension process, making connections to prior content knowledge. Said knowledge, as described in the case of Mr. Franklin's 'Join, or Die' cartoon, would be applied at this juncture to place the image within its proper historical context and thus better understood. At this time in the process the student would begin to interpret the author's purpose for creating the image. Such an interpretation would include what the author wanted the reader to learn from the graphic and an understanding of the author's opinion on the topic or event based on the manner in which it is represented. Each of these sequential skills described here is an important part of developing a student's visual literacy and would require time and effort to develop should any teacher wish to implement political cartoons or any other visual imagery in their classrooms.

While Norman's steps appear to flow within a very structured pattern for developing visual literacy, there is another segment involved in this comprehension process that she included that was to take place simultaneously with all other steps mentioned above. That step is making a connection to one's self. Werner (2004) echoes this sentiment in his discussions on the topic of intertextuality. Intertextuality refers to the processes used by viewers to interpret images based on their collective individual experiences. Just as Norman expected her students to use their own personal background to assist in the comprehension of images found within a textbook, Werner expects similar connections to be made using political cartoons. His work illustrates the need for students to bring a certain degree of cultural capital to any discussions dealing with these visuals. As examples he uses Michelangelo's fresco *The Creation of Adam* from the Sistine Chapel ceiling and Joe Rosenthal's iconic World War II photograph of the raising of the flag at Iwo Jima, two images that have been commonly borrowed by political cartoonists over time (see Figures 2.2 and 2.3 for examples of what Werner refers to as "visual quoting"). The appropriate application of relevant cultural knowledge about works of art, historic events, etc., according to Werner, is paramount if the reader of the cartoons is to move beyond the literal and correctly interpret the metaphor or other device(s) being used by

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the creator of the image. Mr. Franklin's cartoon once again provides us with an example of the processes that Norman and Werner speak of. Truly understanding the meaning of the cartoon requires a certain degree of cultural knowledge that would have been readily available to those who would have met the traditional definition of literate at the time. The first piece of said knowledge involves Mr. Franklin's choice of a snake to represent the American colonies. In a letter published in the Pennsylvania Journal on December 27, 1775 by "An American Guesser" (later identified as Benjamin Franklin) the author writes the following about his admiration for the scaly reptile.

> "...She never begins an attack, nor, when once engaged, ever surrenders: She is therefore an emblem of magnanimity and true courage... she never wounds 'till she has generously given notice, even to her enemy, and cautioned him against the danger of treading on her."

A second piece of cultural knowledge relevant to the time period and important to gaining a better understanding of the political cartoon is the popular superstition of the time that a snake which had been killed with a blow from an edged weapon would come back to life if the

Figure 2.2 'Michelangelo's The Creation of Adam'
Cartoon by Michael Kountouris (January 31, 2010)
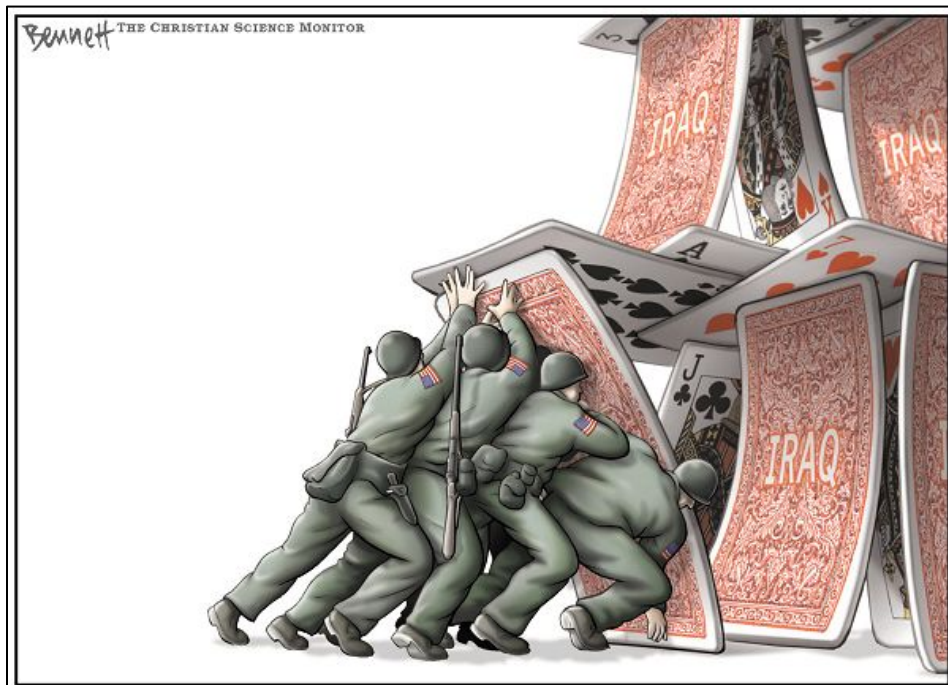
Figure 2.3 'The raising of the flag at Iwo Jima'
Cartoon by Clay Bennett (September 21, 2004)

separated pieces were placed next to each other (Hess, 1975). An understanding of these two pieces of information would go a long way towards ensuring an effective interpretation of the cartoon. While background knowledge such as Mr. Franklin's appreciation of native reptile species and the commonly held fallacies concerning ophiological regeneration seem less likely than more recent cultural phenomenon to be housed within the minds of today's students, these examples point to the need that exists for teachers and students alike to do a significant amount of work on both their content knowledge as well as their skills prior to embarking on what would surely be a historic journey using political cartoons.

Summary

The history of the political cartoon is as rich and as varied as the colorful history of the United States itself. From Mr. Franklin's colonial-era snake to the cartoonists who continue to make us both laugh and think today there exists in these cartoons a visually engaging and conversation instigating documentation of the people, places, and events that have lead us collectively to the place we are today. These cartoons possess the capacity beyond that of the ordinary text to transport the reader to a particular time and location and further allow

them to place their finger firmly on the pulse of the nation at that unique time. Given the information laid out in this chapter, the proper use of these cartoons as a learning tool in the American history classroom could potentially provide students with the types of engaging and authentic classroom lessons necessary to improve upon what can only be described as our collective historical amnesia.

The use of political cartoons in the American history classroom has the additional potential to improve overall instruction in two distinct ways. The first of these two lies in the ability of the political cartoon to tap into the unique learning characteristics of the twenty-first century student. These students, increasingly media savvy as a result of a near round the clock visual bombardment by a multitude of technological platforms, have demonstrated a desire to experience more visually engaging materials in their classrooms. The second of the two probable benefits to the use of political cartoons can be found in their capacity to defeat what authors and researchers have referred to as the 'tyranny of the textbook'. As a valuable primary source document, the use of political cartoons increases the possibility of providing students with historical perspectives they might not otherwise experience. These perspectives offer students the opportunity to stretch their intellectual wings and utilize any number of

critical thinking skills to determine for themselves what really happened in American history, instead of blindly swallowing information from textbooks exposed as being comprised of equal parts politics and history.

In spite of the obvious changes in the learning habits of the Millennial generation and the wealth of knowledge placed at the fingertips of students through the use of political cartoons and other primary source documents, traditional teaching practices continue to prevail in classrooms across the nation. School districts have begun to address this issue by reworking their educational standards to include the use of primary sources to supplement the course text, some going as far as listing the analysis of political cartoons among their specific grade level expectations. Unfortunately, the simple rewording of educational standards by itself is no guarantee that the positive changes desired will actually take place. The already overextended population of classroom teachers cannot be expected to implement these changes on their own. They will require assistance in the areas of both content and pedagogy. A failure to do so will simply result in a recreation of the abysmal results of the cartoon related studies mentioned earlier in this text. One specific piece of assistance that classroom teachers would require is a better understanding of the

comprehension processes used by students when deciphering a political cartoon from a specific period in history. When completed, the project that will be described in greater detail in the coming pages will hopefully provide teachers with just such information. Armed with the knowledge of how students make meaning from political cartoons, the classroom teacher will possess another arrow to add to the quiver of strategies with the potential to meet the needs of today's learners and ultimately improve their overall knowledge of American history.

Chapter 3

Research Methods

Study Background/Process

The research questions designed to guide this investigation, as stated earlier in this work, are as follows;

1. How do middle school students describe and assess the materials and activities that are employed throughout their educational experiences in the American History classroom?

2. How do middle school students gain a better understanding of specific historical content through the use of political cartoons?

Preliminary steps to design a study that would address the stated research questions initially met with less than stellar results. Interviews with six middle school American History teachers in the targeted Florida school district yielded remarkable results that were truly eye-opening, but for all the wrong reasons (refer to Appendix B

for teacher interview protocols). While almost all of the teachers could readily identify one or two political cartoons that they had used over the course of their instruction for the entire school year ("…oh yes, we looked at a political cartoon when we read the chapter on Thomas Jefferson in the textbook…", "…we saw that one cartoon in the book about Andrew Jackson and the national bank…"), it very quickly became evident that these classroom teachers did not use political cartoons as a regularly appearing pedagogical approach to instruction in their American History classrooms (Note - The images referenced in the above quotes can be seen in Figures 3.1 and 3.2).This repeatedly echoed pattern of responses by the teachers in these initial interviews gave rise to additional questions that seemed to be best addressed by someone more knowledgeable about the approaches to instruction used in eighth grade American History classrooms across the school district. As such, the Social Studies subject area supervisor for middle schools in the targeted school district was sought out and interviewed for her perspectives on the results from these early talks with classroom teachers concerning the use of political cartoons to teach about American History.

When asked point blank if she believed that political cartoons

Figure 3.1 'Office Hunters for the Year 1834'
Cartoon by Anthony Imbert, 1834

Figure 3.2 'General Jackson Slaying…'
Cartoon by Henry Robinson, 1836

were used on a regular basis in the eighth grade American History classrooms across her district, the subject area supervisor responded with a simple "No". She went on to clarify that the few instances where political cartoons are used for purposes of instruction are generally limited to the rather small list of the most easily recognizable political cartoons from the past that can be routinely found in textbooks published and used across the nation (e.g., Franklin's 'Join, or Die' cartoon, 'The Horse America Throwing His Master', etc.). When asked to elaborate on her own personal perspectives as to why this educational tool remained largely unused, her responses ran the gamut. Prior to relaying her perspective on the list of reasons why political cartoons were for the most part overlooked by the instructors in her district, she first paused and made it a point to emphasize that she did not believe that the omission of these materials from the day to day instruction received by students was in any way a recrimination as to a lacking of skill level or dedication within the characters of the classroom teachers. Once that position had been firmly established, she began to work her way through the list of possible reasons why political cartoons were routinely omitted as an instructional strategy in so many classrooms. The first reason, which definitely clarified several of the responses mentioned previously from the classroom teachers, involved the availability of resources. She emphasized the scant

materials that come prepackaged with the adopted textbook as one of the culprits in this area of concern. Left to their own devices, she said, few teachers possess the time required to identify appropriate additional resources or even the knowledge of where said resources could be found to supplement their history instruction. The issue of time seemed particularly important to her explanation and she expanded on this theme when she included anecdotal evidence about the sheer volume of material that was required to be covered over the course of the school year, material that would most assuredly appear in one form or another on the district generated end of course exam (the course curriculum for middle school Social Studies for the targeted school district will be addressed with greater specificity later in this chapter). This seemed especially pertinent given the recent changes that have been adopted across the district and the entire state of Florida concerning the use of standardized test scores in determining the overall evaluations of classroom teachers. Hearing these explanations given by the district supervisor, it almost seemed as if she was reading word for word from the list of difficulties faced by teachers that was created by van Hover and Yeager (2004) and mentioned in greater detail in the second chapter of this work.

Another reason given by the subject area supervisor dealt with a possible lack of confidence teachers may have with the materials, primarily the multitude of possible perspectives on any one given subject that a political cartoon has the potential to bring to the table. Some teachers might be concerned that they may interpret the cartoon incorrectly. Others may be worried that they might be asked a question by a student that they cannot answer. This problem may be mostly a function of the fact that the majority of political cartoons from the past that are available for use in the classroom do not come with an answer key like the textbook and ancillary materials teachers are more familiar with. The supervisor also hypothesized that this could be part of the larger phenomenon of an overreliance on the course textbook for instruction. At this point she again shared anecdotal tales of conversations with teachers where she reminded them that the textbook was not the curriculum, with each tale ending with a similar tone of how her suggestions had appeared to fall on deaf ears. These tales seemed to mimic the observations on the 'tyranny of the textbook' by James Loewen and others mentioned in the Literature Review section of this paper. That 'tyranny' seems most evident when teachers become hesitant to seek out and accept different viewpoints on historical events. With the emphasis on testing that continues to steamroll the field of education, there is an increasingly overemphasis

on getting across the one 'right' answer that the students are most likely to encounter on a standardized test rather than fostering the deeper understanding of historical events that political cartoons and other primary source documents have the potential to provide.

The final major point raised by the content area supervisor dealt with the possibility that many classroom teachers view the realm of political cartoons as a more modern, twentieth century phenomenon. This perception went hand in hand with her first observations on the lack of knowledge concerning the resources available on the subject of political cartoons. Had the classroom teachers possessed an awareness of the cartoons available from across the spectrum of American History, especially in the era of digitized primary sources such as those used in the works of Tally and Goldenberg (2005), they would not have this slanted view of cartoons as a more modern instructional tool. Instead, according to the supervisor, teachers in her district continue to associate political cartoons with current events. With the topic of current events raised, it seemed appropriate at this point to pose additional questions in the same vein. As evidenced in Appendix A of this work, the state of Florida's Next Generation Sunshine State Standards for eighth grade American History lists in Standard 1: Benchmark 3 that students will "…analyze current events relevant to

American History topics through a variety of electronic and print media resources…", it would seem that current events are expected to be an important part of instruction in the classroom. If that were truly the case and if teachers did, in fact, view political cartoons as primarily a tool to study recent topics in the news, then why when asked did the classroom teachers not mention their use of political cartoons when studying current events in their classes? The response from the supervisor was as emphatic as her initial response to questions about political cartoons. In her opinion, very few teachers dealt with current events in their classrooms on a day to day basis across the district and even fewer used cartoons from the present. She believed that this had a lot to do with the "sophistication" of current events. Many teachers, in her opinion, might not feel confident in their own understanding of the multitude of layers in the realm of politics and the news of today. She went on to say that current events, given the politically charged climate that we live in, can often times be very "messy". It was at this point that the conversation brought to mind a well-known quote from John Gardner. It was in 1968 that the former U.S. Marine Corps officer and Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare during the administration of President Lyndon Johnson wrote the following;

History never looks like history when you are living through it. It always looks confusing and messy, and it always feels uncomfortable. (Gardner, 1968)

The quote seemed to eloquently restate her point concerning the reluctance for teachers to cover current events, using political cartoons or any other available instructional tool. The subject area supervisor wrapped up the conversation by stating that many teachers were reluctant to approach the myriad controversial issues and points of view that populate the headlines from day to day, a reluctance highlighted by the fear of mishandling a topic and its potential to turn the teachers themselves into the headline.

While the responses from both the initial round of interviews with classroom teachers as well as the district's supervisor for middle school Social Studies seemed to have diminished the likelihood of proceeding with this study as it had been initially conceived, an alternative route to reaching the stated goals began to come into focus. While five of the six instructors had made it abundantly obvious that they did not use political cartoons in their American History classrooms on a regular basis, a pattern made clear to be the rule rather than the exception across the district based on observations

from the subject area supervisor, the sixth teacher painted a very different picture of the processes used in his classroom. This teacher, henceforth referred to as Mr. Daniels, responded to questions from the initial interview in such a manner as to hint at his potential to be the "…oasis of a dynamic teacher…" Flemming (2002) made mention of in the early pages of this work. Not only had Mr. Daniels designed and implemented a yearlong approach to the use of primary source documents such as political cartoons from both the past and the present, he did so in a manner that appeared to be in polar opposite contrast to the images constructed previously from the classroom teachers and their supervisor. Early on in his career, Mr. Daniels made it a point to familiarize himself with not only the resources available from the textbook publishing companies but also countless other print and web-based organizations whose materials appear regularly as a part of his class. From early observations made in his classroom, it was clear that Mr. Daniels encouraged a multiple perspectives approach to American History, one supported by his use of cartoons in hopes that students might gain a deeper understanding of history (a process highlighted by his willingness to routinely tell his students that there are some answers to their questions that he simply did not know). Lastly, Mr. Daniels regularly covered topics in the news, reinforced with political cartoons from the present, in a mature

thought provoking back and forth that his students appeared to genuinely appreciate. These factors, all in contrast to the previous findings about the use of these educational resources, made it abundantly clear that Mr. Daniels' classroom was a truly rare phenomenon within the targeted school district. As a result of coming across such a unique pedagogical approach to the use of political cartoons in the American History classroom the decision was made that to best address the research questions for this investigation a case study approach would be used.

Case Study

The terms that make up the definition of a case study have been written, rewritten and debated over the years as researchers have disagreed over its form, function, and validity. One definition, given here by John Gerring of Boston University, seems to simplify the discussion while retaining many of the integral elements that fall into the realm of general consensus;

A case study... is best defined as an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class

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of (similar) units. (Gerring, 2004)

Yin adds shape to this definition by describing the circumstances where a case study would be best suited. He states that a case study approach would be most appropriate in those instances where someone wanted to better understand a real-life phenomenon in depth while incorporating the complete contextual conditions in the final analysis (Yin, 2009). Such were the circumstances of this study as it ultimately desired to explain the use of political cartoons within the walls of the middle school American History classroom. To be more specific, the design used in this study would be better described as a single case study. Such studies are best suited when the case represented a genuinely distinctive phenomenon, as was clearly evidenced by Mr. Daniels unique infusion of political cartoons into his daily instruction. Many well-known authors such as Robert Stake and Helen Simons have written about research using a case study approach while designing a systematic process to conducting such research successfully (Soy, 1997). This project's design was intended to mirror the path they suggested.

The first steps to the process suggested by these researchers involve a detailed literature review and a determination of how the

study will be designed. The background information and review of the literature found in chapters one and two of this paper have thoroughly explained the rationale for this study as well as the research that has been done in the field. These sections have clearly illustrated the educational value of a greater emphasis towards visual literacy given the unique characteristics of the twenty-first century student. They have also explained the important role that primary source documents such as political cartoon have the potential to play in emphasizing that visual literacy while also fostering a deeper understanding of our nation's history. As for the determination of research methodology, the initial pages of this chapter have undoubtedly made clear the need for a single case study approach to collect, present, and analyze the data on what is definitely an uncommon set of circumstances in this one teacher's classroom. The remaining steps suggested by these authors, the processes of data collection and analysis, will be addressed in the proceeding sections beginning with a description of the study participants.

Participant Characteristics - Teacher

For the purposes of this investigation, the research data took the form of verbatim transcriptions of interviews conducted with teachers

and students on the topic of political cartoons in the American History classroom. The first steps to gathering data for this study required an initial phase of participant recruitment. The teacher participants mentioned earlier in this chapter represented what is best described as a sample of convenience in that they were selected from the identical Florida school district where the author of this paper has been employed for eighteen years as a middle school World Geography and American History teacher. Through the mechanism of the school district's central administration assessment and accountability department, a request for teacher participants was generated and distributed among the fifty-three middle schools located in the district. The selection criteria for teachers to participate in this study consisted of their use of political cartoons to interpret historical events in American history in their classrooms on a semi-regular basis (defined as using political cartoons at least once in each of the four nine-week grading periods that comprise a school year) and their willingness to open their classrooms to the data collection process. The first wave of respondents was the six teachers whose answers were previously discussed in detail. It was the results from these initial interviews that guided the Principal Investigator towards a conversation with the school district's subject area supervisor and ultimately to the single case study approach to investigate the use of political cartoons in one

very unique classroom. No other teachers were sought out to participate after these first six, as their responses combined with those of their supervisor made it clear that to continue the search for additional participants would be the epitome of an exercise in futility. It is worth mentioning here that a single case study such as the one used here has been criticized in the past by some as having too small of a sample size, in this instance a single classroom teacher, to yield results generalizable to the population as a whole. But Kvale (1996) guards against a selection size for research purposes that is too large. He reminds future principal investigators that in a qualitative approach such as the ones found in case studies the goal is to make penetrating interpretations of the interviews and relate the results to the questions that are central to the study, not to generate the mountainous sums of data needed to assert statistical generalizations or to test hypotheses. Kvale also notes the importance researchers must place when taking into consideration the amount of resources, such as time and money for assistance with tasks like typing interview transcripts that will be needed to conduct the interviews and analyze the results. Rational voices such as Kvale were key to the participant selection process of this study that lead to Mr. Daniels.

As the information in the results section of this paper will show, Mr. Daniels has a truly remarkable approach to teaching American History (and not just with political cartoons). Even more remarkable is the circuitous route he took to joining the profession as a teacher in the targeted school district. Born in 1954 in the New York City borough of Queens, Mr. Daniels is a true 'Yankee' in every sense of the word - from his distinctive and oft-imitated accent right down to his ardent faithfulness to his beloved 'Bronx Bombers' (Mr. Daniels' father, a World War II US Navy veteran, would have preferred his son to root for the Dodgers but became disillusioned with the sport when the franchise relocated to the west coast). A graduate of Geneseo State University and Rutgers Law School, Mr. Daniels practiced law in New York for more than a dozen years - specializing primarily in zoning laws and land use rules for various regulated industries. Eventually becoming disillusioned with a profession where he thought he would be "serving the public good," Mr. Daniels decided to leave the courtroom and try something "totally different." He succeeded in that task when he moved on to work as a certified arborist for a New York area tree service company. It was just about the same time that Mr. Daniels traded in the field of law for a field of trees that he began making regular visits to his mother's retirement home in the state of Florida. His love for the natural beauty of the state's flora and fauna, combined

with a series of promotions for the tree service company that had him now stuck in a stuffy office all day long, inspired Mr. Daniels to permanently relocate to Florida's peninsula in 2000. Once there, he enrolled at St. Leo University to complete his teaching credentials (he had actually first entered college with the intention of becoming a teacher but the Vietnam era education hiring crunch in the northeast had caused him to change his mind). A brief stint as a substitute followed by a permanent hiring and more than a decade of successful teaching experience in an eighth grade American History classroom finished off Mr. Daniels colorful trek and landed him squarely within the crosshairs of this research study.

Participant Characteristics - Students

While it is possible that the selection of only one teacher for this study might lend credence to those who would argue that this is too small of a sample size, it is important to note that this one teacher regularly interacted with over one hundred middle school students every day during the school year when this study took place - a more than sufficient potential pool of study participants. While the selection process in identifying the teacher for this study most assuredly leans towards the definition of a sample of convenience, the selection of the

student participants was considerably more purposeful. While the study was limited to the class rolls of Mr. Daniels' American History sections and those parents/students willing to grant their consent/assent to participate in the research process, from those who did agree to be interviewed a maximum variation sampling was used. List (2004) defines a maximum variation sampling as one in which the researcher selects participants who cover the broadest spectrum of positions and perspectives possible based on a predetermined set of dimensions. List further asserts that such a process is especially advantageous when the sample size is small, as in this particular case study. The dimensions that were used in this sampling were based on the population characteristics of the Florida school district where the study took place. Said district, with over two hundred schools and more than two hundred thousand students, reports a racial profile of 41% White, 29% Hispanic, 22% African-American, 5% Multiracial, and 3% Asian. Additional data includes 13% of the population designated as students who do not speak English as their primary language and 53% of students who come from families that are eligible for the district's free and reduced lunch program. From these dimensions, every practical effort was made to include as many of the multitude of permutations as possible (i.e., White male on free and reduced lunch, Hispanic female not on free and reduced lunch, Asian male who does

not speak English as his primary language and does receive free and reduced lunch, etc.). List's position is that such a selection can and should be as representative as a random sample in that the aggregate answers derived from this type of data collection process has the potential to yield responses typical of the whole population.

While every effort was made to maximize the variations of the sample of student participants, the process was limited by the unique demographics of the school where the study took place. Fortunately, with the exception of a larger than average Hispanic population and a smaller percentage of African-Americans, the student demographics of the school that was the study site for this project were remarkably similar to the demographic statistics of the school district as a whole. The school's population of more than one thousand and one hundred students falls into the following categories; 42% Hispanic, 41% White, 7% African-American, 6% Multiracial, and 4% Asian. Additionally, 22% of the school's population is identified as requiring exceptional education services (district average 19%), 12% are those whose primary language spoken in the home is not English, and 51% are students targeted as economically disadvantaged and eligible for the district's free and reduced lunch program. The school as a whole has a strong academic reputation, never receiving less than a 'B' and

including a four year streak of 'A's based on the state of Florida's A+ school evaluation system. Although the school did not make the federal No Child Left Behind requirements for adequate yearly progress for the most recent year that data was available, the State Department of Education reported that during the 2010-2011 school year 71% of students were reading at or above grade level and 72% were found to be at or above grade level in mathematics achievement. It was from this school's diverse combination of race, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and achievement that the student participants for this study were selected.

The nine students whose responses to interviews will comprise a major portion of this study's results are described as follows (note - all names are aliases);

- Maria, a thirteen-year-old regular education Hispanic female who does not receive English language services and is not eligible for free/reduced lunch.
- Nathaniel, a thirteen-year-old regular education White male who is not eligible for free/reduced lunch.

- Dana, a fourteen-year-old regular education Multiracial female who does not receive English language services and is not eligible for free/reduced lunch.

- Kate, a thirteen-year-old regular education Hispanic female who does not receive English language services and is eligible for free/reduced lunch.

- Angela, a fourteen-year-old gifted education Hispanic female who does not receive English language services and is not eligible for free/reduced lunch.

- Albert, a fourteen-year-old regular education White male who is eligible for free/reduced lunch.

- Joseph, a fourteen-year-old gifted education Hispanic male who receives English language services and is not eligible for free/reduced lunch.

- Dorothy, a fourteen-year-old regular education Hispanic female who receives English language services and is eligible for free/reduced lunch.

- Bryan, a fourteen-year-old regular education White male who is eligible for free/reduced lunch.

As will be evidenced with considerable detail in this and the remaining sections of this paper, the decision made by the Principal Investigator

to stop at only nine participants had two dimensions. One, by the completion of the set of interviews with the ninth participant the data collection process had reached a state of saturation. The information uncovered from the last in the series of student interviews was in no way discernibly different from the data that had already been gathered from earlier conversations (in fact some responses were identical to the point of being word for word from earlier answers) and there was no process of logical reasoning that could lead one to expect anything but continued similar results from any additional participants. Two, the potential pool of additional participants who had completed the necessary paperwork would have provided no significant differences in demographic variations from the nine students described above.

Curriculum

The curriculum used by these students in their eighth grade American History classroom is a creation of the county school district's administration in correlation with Florida's Next Generation Sunshine State Standards (see Appendix A) and, more recently, the Common Core State Standards Initiative. The history curriculum at the targeted school district covers the period of time from the European colonization of the western hemisphere, through the American

independence movement, and culminates with the era of Reconstruction just after the U.S. Civil War. In addition to the aforementioned references to current events, the curriculum includes specific instruction on Florida's history in each of the eras mentioned above. Added to this historical content throughout the curriculum are a variety of generic Social Studies processing skills (i.e. map reading, using primary source documents, etc.) that are expected to be mastered prior to a student's promotion to the high school level. The analysis of political cartoons is one such skill included in these grade level expectations and is the primary reasoning for the selection of this particular student population to be studied. Florida is not unique in this inclusion of political cartoons in their curriculum design. Other states such as Georgia and Louisiana have a similar pattern in their grade level expectations, listing the analysis of political cartoons as a skill to be introduced as a part of the Social Studies content in the elementary years (K-5), mastered in the middle grades (6-8), and continually applied to improve mastery in high school (9-12). It is during the implementation of Florida's eighth grade American History curriculum that the observations and interviews for this study were made. Those observations revolved around the specific strategies (e.g. spiraling questioning techniques, cooperative learning, group discussions, etc.) that the classroom teacher utilized to employ political cartoons in

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assisting in the delivery of the mandated history curriculum. Also observed was the comprehension processes, such as those described earlier by Norman (2010) and Werner (2004), which students used with political cartoons to make meaning of historical content. The observations and conversations conducted with both the teacher and the students took place during the fourth and final grading period of the school year. This item is of importance in that it had a significant impact on the selection process used to determine which political cartoons would be utilized as a part of this study. The unique pacing, instructional methods used in the delivery of the assigned curriculum, and ancillary materials used throughout the school year by Mr. Daniels made it so that the student interviews took place at or about the point during the school year when the students were studying the era of Manifest Destiny and western expansion as well as the major events leading up to and including the start of the U.S. Civil War.

Data Collection

As touched on in sections prior to this page, the data collected for this study took the form of a series of three interviews conducted with students selected through a maximum variation sampling process. Prior to selecting student participants for the interviews, the

principal Investigator attempted to immerse himself within the classroom of the selected participants in hopes of establishing a comfort level as well as a relationship of trust between researcher and subject (a relationship that reached a state of being fully developed when on multiple occasions students, including those not chosen as participants in the study, greeted the Principal Investigator by name and even exchanged "high-fives" in the hallways of the school during the passing time between class periods). Multiple visits were planned and executed before the first interviews were performed, each taking place on different days of the week as well as at different times of the school day. These initial visits did not necessarily correspond to history instruction centered on the use of political cartoons or other primary source documents. These early visits were designed to accomplish a different goal; one Marshall (1996) described as achieving a truly naturalistic process. Such an approach takes into account not only the individual participant characteristics but also the temporal, spatial, and the situational/organizational influences of the individual schools and classrooms, that is, the context of the study. Referring back to Yin's (2009) contributions in defining a successful case study, the approach he espoused encouraged such contextual inclusion as being paramount to fully understanding in depth the real-life phenomenon that was being studied. To further establish such a context for the study, prior

to interviewing the student participants a series of informal conversations took place with the classroom teacher. These conversations revolved around the processes used and the unique experiences that Mr. Daniels has had using political cartoons in his classrooms throughout his career. The interview protocols for the formal interviews that were done in addition to these more relaxed conversations with Mr. Daniels can be found under B and C in the Appendix section at the end of this paper. The level of comfort and familiarity with the steps used regularly in history classed derived from these formal and informal conversations assisted the process in the development of interview questions that would be used later with the student participants as well as improving on the likelihood of those questions receiving genuine responses. Such a level of honesty in the responses from the participants allowed the researcher to reduce the impact of observer effect and to accurately convey the lived experiences of political cartoons in the classroom from the perspectives of both the students and their teacher and additionally aided in the discernment of patterns in responses and ultimately the development of the theories put forth in the results section of this paper.

The interviewing process that was used for the student participants in this portion of this study were meant to follow the design set forth by Dolbeare and Schuman (Schuman, 1982). This three interview series allowed participants to express their experiences in such a manner as to place them into that previously mentioned all-important context from which the researcher gained a better insight into the ways in which students analyzed and made use of the historical information found in political cartoons. The first interview was designed to allow the researcher to gain some personal background on the students' experiences with and attitudes about the use of the various materials and activities that their American History teacher employed on a regular basis in their classroom. This interview was also designed to allow an investigation into the students individual experiences with political cartoons while assisting in the description of the unique context regarding how the cartoons are introduced and utilized in their particular American History classroom (see Appendix D for the details on the protocol for the first interview). This initial line of questioning mirrors the process of situational reflection used by Dervin (1976) and encouraged by Shenton (2004) to improve the credibility and trustworthiness of the data gathering process.

The second interview was executed in such a manner as to provide the students an opportunity to demonstrate their skills in interpreting a specific political cartoon. The questions established for use in the second interview (see Appendix E for the script of the second interview protocol) again were designed to elicit information from the students about the comprehension processes involved in deciphering historical content from a political cartoon and spiraled along the skill set described by Norman and Werner that was nearly identical to the questioning techniques of the classroom teacher. During this second interview participants were afforded options as it related to the medium they used to view the cartoons that were examined. The first option involved a high quality color political cartoon printed on a standard 8 1/2" X 11" sheet of paper with captions and/or titles typed out on the back. The second option allowed the participants to view and interact with the political cartoon via an Apple iPad tablet computer. This tablet computer approach was selected as an option for participants because of the basic common features, such as "pinch-to-zoom", that have become ubiquitous in the daily lives of the millennial generation. In this area all of the student participants demonstrated a significant level of comfort with the technological option afforded to them, a comfort level not necessarily shared by everyone who was present during the interviews. As an

illustration of the student participant's familiarity with this technology it is worthy, and somewhat humorous, at this point to recount a particular series of events that took place during one of these interview sessions. During the second in the series of interviews with the subject Dana, there was a problem with the tablet computer repeatedly timing out and requiring a password to be entered to relaunch the photo application that included the cartoon image that was being analyzed. Without hesitation, other than the brief moment that included a sigh as well as a judgmental roll of the eyes towards the technological clumsiness of the adult in the room, Dana picked up the iPad, launched the appropriate application, and entered new parameters to the settings function that rectified the situation. Upon completing this task she took the time to attempt an explanation as to the process she had just used to correct the problem, only to give up after only a few syllables when she saw a look in the eyes of the Principal Investigator that she rightfully interpreted to be that of utter hopelessness.

The third and final interview in the data collection process served as an opportunity for member checking of the data gathered from the first two interview sessions as well as a period of reflection on the process as a whole. The member checking at this stage was essential

to ensure that the words listed on the interview transcriptions match not only the actual words spoken by the participant, but also their intent. Such accuracy was paramount to ensure the credibility of the data gathered as well as the dependability of the results and/or conclusions that follow. As the questions for the third interview were meant to be structured around the unique information/experiences gathered from each participant during the first two in the series of interviews, a specific blanket set of protocols for this final interview was not created prior to the implementation of this study.

The decisions on the timing and location of these interviews with the students was made in conjunction with the school's administration through a series of face to face conversations as well as other forms of electronic messaging. In each case where a school visit for either classroom observation or student interviews was planned to take place, the school's administration and the classroom teacher were given several days' notice. It was also explicitly communicated in each of these instances that Mr. Daniels had passed on the advanced notice to the student participants who were to be interviewed. With the exception of one instance where a miscommunication about the prior scheduling of end of course exams that lead to the unavailability of some of the students for interviews during one particular school visit,

this system of communication functioned very well. That functionality served to increase the comfort level of the participants, as evidence by their jovial nature during the various interview sessions (in an effort to achieve full disclosure, it is worth mentioning that through the interview process it was determined that for some students the 'jovial nature' identified here was less a factor of the Principal Investigator and the interview process and more a function of the participants being pulled out of a class that they did not particularly care for). Again, in coordination with the onsite administration, decisions as to the geographic location that the participant interviews were to take place were agreed upon. The overwhelming majority of the interviews took place in an unassigned office located in the campus administration building. This site was ideal for its central location as well as its potential for privacy. With the office door closed the interviewee was free from distractions or any sort of fears about the confidentiality of his or her responses. On the few occasions when this office was unavailable for these interviews, the principal's conference room or the media specialist's office was used. As in the case of the unassigned office in the administration building, each of these additional sites provided a location that was free of distractions and protective of privacy. As for the format of the interviews themselves, each of them began with a review of the entire process, a specific

reminded about the structure and purpose of the individual interview, and a conversation about the anticipated duration of the interview session. In regards once again to privacy, at the outset of each interview the participants were reminded of the confidentiality agreement contained within the consent/assent paperwork. This process served again to assuage any nervousness or apprehension on the part of the participant, sensations that in some seemed to peak when they saw the digital voice recorder being used by the Principal Investigator and were reminded that the sessions were being recorded for later transcription and review. The times and locations for the informal conversations and formal interviews with Mr. Daniels were considerably more varied than they were for data collection portion of this process that involved the students. The informal conversations took place before and after school in his classroom, in between periods in the hallways outside of class, and even in the teacher's cafeteria during his lunch break. The more formal interview sessions took place at the homes of both Mr. Daniels and the Principal Investigator. As was the case with the students, the locations and timing of each of these conversations were designed to maximize the comfort level of the classroom teacher while maintaining the confidentiality and integrity of the entire process.

As stated at an earlier point in this section, the interviews were anticipated to take place around the same time that the students were studying the events of the western expansion of the United States during the early to mid-1800s as well as the specific events that lead to the Civil War. As the timing of the interviews was constructed to ensure that the participants would have at least a rudimentary understanding of the historical context of the image, a cartoon from that time period was selected to be the focus of the second in the series of interviews. Having served as a district level trainer and on numerous curriculum writing and textbook adoption committees throughout his career, the Principal Investigator possessed the prerequisite knowledge necessary to select an appropriate image for this time period based on its frequent use in digitized databases and appearances in American History textbooks. That cartoon was 'Forcing Slavery Down the Throat of a Freesoiler,' an image published by John L. Magee in 1856 (see Figure 3.3 to view an image of the political cartoon). The cartoon is generally believed to have been created in response to the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Signed into law by President Franklin Pierce on May 30, 1854, the Kansas-Nebraska Act was primarily a piece of legislation meant to deal with the formation of two new U.S. territories. As was the case with a majority of legislation at the time, the initial centerpiece of forming these new territories

became quickly subjugated by the topic of slavery. The previously agreed upon Missouri Compromise of 1820 had made it so that any new territories created in this portion of the country would have to have been done so without allowing slavery to exist within their boundaries. That agreement was repealed by the Kansas-Nebraska Act
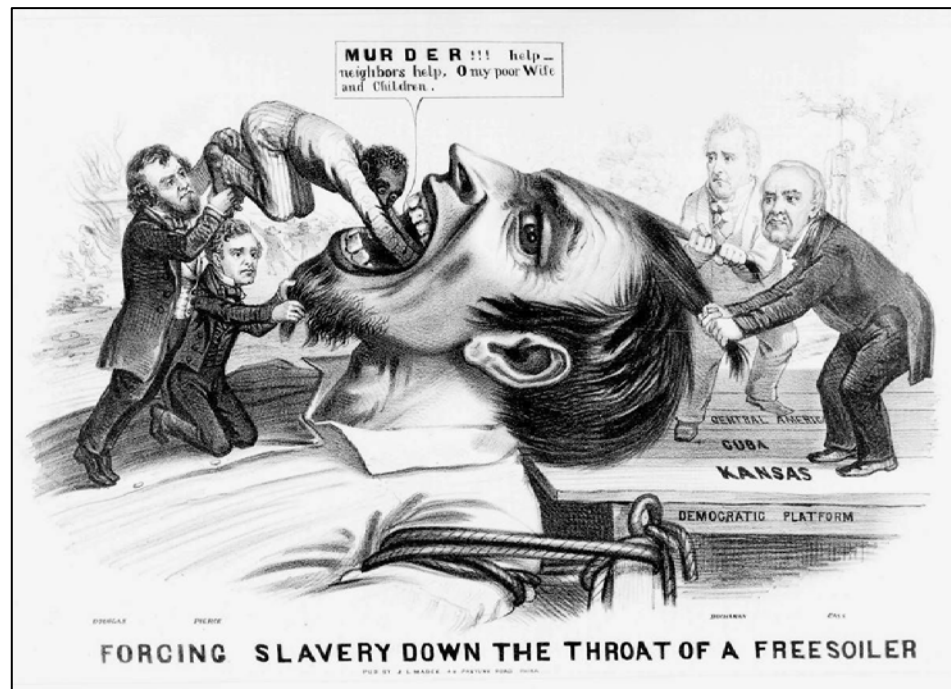
Figure 3.3 'Forcing Slavery Down the Throat of a Freesoiler' Cartoon by John L. Magee (August, 1856)

and instead allowed settlers to these new areas the ability to decide the issue for themselves by a majority vote of the populace living in the territory. Mr. Magee's cartoon has been interpreted by most to be the expression of an opinion in opposition to this process. In the cartoon a 'Freesoiler,' a member of the short-lived abolitionist Free Soil Party whose main purpose was to oppose any expansion of slavery

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into the western U.S. territories, has been bound to the 'Democratic Platform' (the Democratic Party of the time period would be most definitely unrecognizable to the members of its present incarnation as it was the position of the party in the mid-19th century that slavery not only extend westward but also to other parts of the Americas) and is restrained by several smaller characters who are forcing a black man into the 'Freesoiler's' mouth. The smaller characters, identified by the labels written on the cartoon by the original artist, represent presidential nominee James Buchanan, Democratic senators Lewis Cass and Stephen A. Douglas, and President Franklin Pierce. In the background are scenes of burning and pillaging on the left and a dead man hanging from a tree on the right. These background scenes were most likely designed to represent the violence experienced by settlers in the days and weeks leading up to the slavery vote in Kansas, a period often referred to as 'Bleeding Kansas'. While these background images are paramount in the interpretation of the artist's opinion, they were also important in illustrating the usefulness of technology during these interviews. While the background images were hardly visible on the paper copy of the cartoon, the high resolution digital image displayed on the iPad allowed the participants (every interviewee, including Mr. Daniels, used the "zoom" function to enlarge the areas to

improve their view) to experience clearly what the artist had intended them to see.

While Magee's 1856 political cartoon was originally intended to serve as the primary vehicle for students to demonstrate their skills with political cartoons during the second interview, the results from the first interviews as well as the early conversations with Mr. Daniels caused a change in these plans. As the results section will show, Mr. Daniels' yearlong approach to using political cartoons begins first with using cartoons from the present. It is through his use of instruction on current events and analyzing cartoons focused on today's headlines that Mr. Daniels infused within his students a set of skills that they could later apply to cartoons from America's past. With current political cartoons playing such an important role in this classroom, the decision was made to add a cartoon from the present to the beginning portions of the second interview. The cartoon that was selected to be analyzed by the students prior to their analysis of the 1856 image was the cartoon 'Sink' by LouJie.

This more recent of the two cartoons was first seen on the pages of the China Daily News on April 19, 2012. The China Daily, at over 500,000 per issue, has the widest print circulation of any English-

language newspaper in the People's Republic of China. LouJie is one of the paper's most well-known artists and his work is not only seen in China but has been syndicated to several newspapers and websites across the United States. The selection of LouJie's work was designed to serve two distinct purposes. First and foremost it dealt with a topic that Mr. Daniels had confirmed was discussed in his class during their weekly sessions on current events, thereby increasing the likelihood that the students would possess the necessary background knowledge to analyze its meaning. Second the artist used a specific cultural reference in the cartoon, a process described as 'visual quoting' in the Literature Review section and exemplified by the images found in Figures 2.2 and 2.3. This is important as it served as an opportunity to delve into Werner's theory of intertextuality, where students draw from their own personal collection of cultural capital to interpret the images they see. In this instance, that cultural reference dealt with a major event in world history that was also the subject of one of the highest grossing box office films of all time. The political cartoon shows a boat sinking after an unfortunate encounter with an iceberg, most assuredly drawing on symbolism meant to evoke memories of the doomed maiden voyage of the RMS Titanic - or at the very least the misadventures of Jack Dawson as portrayed by Leonardo DiCaprio in the 1997 film. The ship is labeled 'Buffett Tax', referencing the rule/tax

proposed by U.S. President Barack Obama in 2011 that would have changed regulations to apply a considerably higher rate of taxation on the annual income of the nation's millionaires. The rule/tax was named after billionaire American investor Warren Buffett, who has on repeated occasions stated publicly that he is in favor of increased income taxes on the nation's wealthiest citizens. The captain of the ship, obviously a caricature of president Obama based on the commonly used element of a set of oversized ears drawn on the figure, holds desperately onto the ship's rails as it slips further into the murky depths. The last portion of the cartoon's symbolism lies with the iceberg itself, located at the far right of the image. The enormous block of floating ice is clearly drawn into the shape of an elephant's head. This symbolism, tracing it heritage back to an 1874 political cartoon drawn by Thomas Nast titled 'The Third-Term Panic', refers to the mascot of the Republican Party. From this collection of images and their implied symbolism, the artist appears to be expressing an opinion that the rule proposed by President Obama has little or no chance of succeeding over the objections of the Republican members of the U.S. Congress.

Data Analysis

Referencing once again the definition and organizational steps of a case study approach outlined by Yin and other researchers, the data gathered from the previously described classroom observations and interviews with the selected cartoons next went through a thorough analysis. Said process actually began in earnest with the full completion of the three interview series with the fifth student participant. First the interviews were transcribed using online and personnel resources. As mentioned earlier, the students were afforded the opportunity to review the transcripts during the initial moments of the third in the series of interviews to ensure their accuracy. Once the transcripts had been generated and validated by the member checking of these initial five student participants, a sentence by sentence manual coding process began. This process used what Ryan (2003) and others have termed 'pawing' or 'eyeballing', a meticulous proofreading of the collected materials on multiple occasions. This process of repetitious reading allowed the Principal Investigator to live within the data and was intended to increase the likelihood that the patterns in the words, should any such pattern have been determined to have existed, could and would become clearer to the researcher. The initial search through the transcripts of these first five respondents

focused on word based identification techniques such as word repetition or the use of key words or expressions within a specific context. Once a series of word patterns began to emerge from the transcripts, a sort of visual cutting and sorting of phrases or patterns in the language that was used allowed the researcher to begin to classify the student participants words, phrases, and experiences into a series of categories. From these categories a number of themes began to emerge from the collected materials that the Principal Investigator used to derive a collection of hypothesis about the students attitudes towards their American History class as well as the cognitive processes they utilize in their interpretation of specific content through the use of political cartoons. The initially described steps of 'pawing' and 'eyeballing' with the transcripts of the first and second interviews with the first five participants took place prior to each participant's third and final interview session. In this manner, the discussion items used in the culminating conversations could be designed to delve more deeply into the lived experiences of the participants and be more likely to address the topics raised in the research goals. This initial analysis prior to the final interviews also included conversations with the classroom teacher. In some instances, without revealing the name of the participant, clarification of what was said about a classroom experience from the point of view of the

instructor was necessary. These types of clarifications assisted in preventing what Flyvbjerg (2011) warned of as a major pitfall to the case study approach, a bias towards verification. This bias is described as a tendency to confirm a researcher's preconceived notions, a tendency meant to be dealt with by the frequent clarifications sought out by Mr. Daniels. It was presumed that the classroom teacher, with his firsthand knowledge of the unique personalities and circumstances of the classroom being studied, could provide any necessary information to fill in the blanks that arose so as not to allow the Principal Investigator to let his own personal experiences and possible biases as a classroom teacher in his own right taint the whole process. A specific example of this took place during the first interviews with the student participants. When asked how their teacher approached the process of deciphering a cartoon's meaning, the students described in their own words what sounded suspiciously like a spiraling questioning technique. Rather than simply assume this to be the case, the response was brought to the attention of the instructor who confirmed and expanded on the process of questioning that was routinely used with the images. This became especially relevant as that same system of spiraling questions was used in the shaping of the interview protocols for the second interview session. In addition to the frequent clarifications sought from the classroom teacher, several of

the responses generated by the students gave rise to the need for a return to the literature on subjects ranging from student attitudes towards Social Studies and the skills of visual literacy. The relevant additional information collected from this return to the literature will be dealt with in the appropriate passages within the results section of this paper.

Once this detailed process of data analysis had been completed for the first five selected student participants, additional participants were recruited and the data collection process began anew. With each new series of interviews, the results were collected, analyzed, and compared to the data gathered from the preceding participants. These additional interviews continued until the Principal Investigator made the decision that the research project had reached a point of data saturation. As mentioned previously in the section describing the individual student participants, this saturation was determined to have been reached when these additional interviews (four more participants were interviewed bringing the grand total of student participants to nine) were determined to have yielded little or no discernibly new information on the topics being studied. Once again, the decision to stop at these nine participants was additionally guided by the fact that the next batch of potential research subjects to be added to the

interview process possessed no significant difference in their individual demographic characteristics when compared to those students who had already gone through the entire interview process. With the data collection and analysis having been completed, the next step in the process as defined by the research on case studies was to accurately convey the results from the interviews about this unique middle school American History class and its use of political cartoons to a wider audience and add its voice to the literature that has been already collected on the subject. Doing so required the Principal Investigator to adhere to one of Yin's principals of case study data collection, maintaining a chain of evidence. This principle is designed to allow the reader of the finished research product to follow clearly the process from its initial steps to it final conclusions. The path laid out by the researcher should allow anyone to follow the steps designed and implemented by the researcher in the same manner that a police detective would follow the evidence at the scene of a crime ultimately to the arrest of the guilty party (Yin 2009, p.122). If constructed and executed properly, the potentially damning issues of validity and reliability are laid to rest and the overall quality of the case study should be vastly improved. While maintaining this chain of evidence the Principal Investigator also sought to establish and expand upon his own role in the process, a case researcher role defined by Stake

(1995) as the 'teacher'. In such a role, the researcher approaches his or her duties to the presentation of the accumulated data much in the same way a classroom instructor approaches the steps of lesson planning to meet the needs of their students. Just as a teacher formulates their plans in an attempt to meet the unique educational requirements of the children who populate their classroom, the researcher tries to maintain a semblance of focus on the needs of those who will read the report. Those needs are best met through the selection of information and experiences by the researcher that will best facilitate the process of learning about the topic at hand for the reader (Stake 1995, p92). Having accomplished these goals through the effective communication of the words and experiences of Mr. Daniels and the student participants from his classroom, it is hoped that the results and hypotheses contained in the pages of the proceeding sections will lay out a clear path across a detailed map that will lead current and future generations of researchers and educators to a treasure trove of information that they will find useful in improving the overall quality of instruction in their American History classroom.

Chapter 4

Results

The steps that were described in the pages of the proceeding chapter, including the collection of interviews with the participating students and teacher on the topic of the use and analysis of political cartoons in the American History classroom, were conducted exactly as described in that segment. The following section provides a detailed examination of the results that were collected from those steps. As mentioned previously, wherever appropriate, additional research has been identified and added to the results found in the pages of this chapter in an effort to support or improve upon the clarity of the findings of this project. This was especially true as it related to the work of Werner on the concept of intertextuality. This concept, centered on the application during learning of a collection of cultural capital, proved to be an integral lynchpin in establishing a pattern to the responses given by the student participants. Said patterns of responses will be revealed in the following pages via a framework structured around the two research questions that guided this study.

Research Question #1

How do middle school students describe and assess the materials and activities that are employed throughout their educational experiences in the American History classroom?

Attitudes Towards History Class

While the ultimate goal of this study was to specifically examine the utilization of political cartoons for the purposes of history instruction, the first of the two research questions that guided this study was designed to also collect information on student's attitudes as they related to their American History class in general. This information was deemed to be relevant as it has been routinely suggested by many in the field of education that there is a measureable correlation between the attitudes of student and their overall performance in the classroom. In one such study by Liu, Maddox, and Johnson (2004) the authors found as a result of their research that there was a linear relationship between positive attitudes and academic achievement. Investigating variables such as enjoyment, motivation, and freedom from anxiety, they surmised that "...positive attitudes are transferred into higher achievement" (Liu,

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Maddox, & Johnson, 2004, p.603). Recalling the quotes from the likes of Flemming and Loewen on student's negative attitudes towards their history class ("insanely tedious", "boring as hell", "stupid and worthless", etc.) that heavily populated the introductory pages of this paper, it is little wonder that the ever-increasing stack of reports on student's knowledge of American History has yielded such dismal results. In spite of what the reader might have anticipated for results from this study based on some of these prior works, the responses from the students in Mr. Daniels class offered a refreshingly stark contrast to this wave of negativity.

"I enjoy it a lot. It's very interesting. It's not one of those classes where you sit and want to fall asleep. It's one of those classes where you're like... it makes me want to pay attention to it... I also love the teacher. He's amazing." (interview with Albert)

The responses from the student participants during the first in the series of the three interview sessions, the interview specifically targeting the first of the research questions, were overwhelmingly positive in regards to their responses. Words such as "fun", "interesting", and "enjoyable" were routinely bandied about during

these initial conversations with each and every one of the student participants. The sentiments in the above quote bear this out and additionally point towards the possible meaning behind the discrepancy between these responses and those found in earlier studies on students and their attitudes towards history class. Delving deeper into these results, it is plainly obvious that the positive attitudes illustrated by the quote as well as the other responses that support this positivity are most likely a factor of the unique student-teacher relationship that exists in this particular classroom. As Shaughnessy and Haladyna pointed out "…it is the teacher who is key to what social studies will be for the student…" (Shaughnessy & Haladyna, 1985, p.694).

> "I look at my job as actually preparing them to be good citizens. And having an inquisitive mind and looking into things further rather than just doing what somebody tells you to do… Letting them think on their own and explore on their own, but with a teacher's guidance, not just like throw them out to the wolves and say, 'Go learn history'." (interview with Mr. Daniels)

A Personal Touch

It is little wonder that the attitudinal results from Mr. Daniels students were so distinctive. After all, his unique approach to teaching was the basis for the decision to approach this research project from the perspective of the case study. His decidedly different approach to American History paired with the positive attitudes reflected in the student responses pointed the Principal Investigator towards a collection of readings on the concept known as relatedness. Relatedness refers to a person's desire to feel a sense of connectedness to others around them (Ryan 1993). Within the realm of education, conclusions on the subject of relatedness found by the likes of Furrer and Skinner have revealed that a student's feelings of teacher support can serve as a motivating factor for students to remain engaged in the process of learning. This connectedness to a classroom teacher was also discovered to encourage positive learning attributes such as participation and persistence while additionally reducing factors such as anxiety (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). The results from the first interviews with the student participants provided a significant amount of irrefutable proof that such a sense of relatedness did, in fact, exist in the classroom that was being observed. A contributing factor to this sense of relatedness between Mr. Daniels

and his students that was discovered in the patterns of responses during this collection of early conversations was the noticeable sense of respect and admiration that the students had towards Mr. Daniels' knowledge of the subject matter as well as the obvious amount of preparation that routinely goes into his daily lessons.

"I sit there and I wonder. How does he know all this? Was he there? I honestly think that. Because he knows that - he describes so many events. Like as if he was there. It's pretty cool." (interview with Kate)

"I kind of feel geeky, but I spend… three or four hours… looking at this stuff. Now you can just go online and find all this stuff… if you want to do a good job, it is time consuming." (interview with Mr. Daniels)

An additional aspect that appears to have contributed to the overall positive attitudes expressed by the students in regards to their American History class was the willingness of the classroom teacher to admit when he was wrong about something that was said or done in class or that he did not know the correct answer to a student's question (an occurrence that although rare nevertheless surprised his

students - especially those who believed his knowledge base was derived from having experienced many events from America's history, such as the American Revolution, first hand). To address the moments when such a situation would arise, Mr. Daniels designed and implemented a somewhat regularly scheduled segment into his classroom presentations called "You Asked for It!". Borrowing from the popular 1950s American Broadcasting System (known today as ABC) television show of the exact same name where viewers were asked to send in postcards describing some unique person or phenomenon that they wanted to see on television, Mr. Daniels presentations are his own personal spin on the idea based on specific questions or observations from the students that arose from throughout the week.

"So when we ask a question… he always gives us a good answer. If he ever does say: 'Oh, I don't know', he has this thing at the end of the week called 'You Asked for It!' and he looks up the thing and then he gives us the answer… It makes you feel better… when he spends his time looking up something that he didn't know to give you the answer." (interview with Dana)

In one such example the students, having just read a primary source document from the Civil War on the horrible conditions of the Andersonville prison, wondered aloud if the author of the passage had survived his experience (they were especially curious to discover if he had survived his dreaded Andersonville experience only to die like so many others in the SS Sultana accident near Memphis, Tennessee in 1865). Not knowing the complete biography of the author, John L. Ransom, Mr. Daniels conducted his own investigation into much greater detail on the Confederate Prisoner-of-war camp in the state of Georgia and its many inhabitants. Through his investigations he found that the author not only survived through his experiences in the prison but lived to see the turn of the century, passing away in the city of Los Angeles in 1919 at the ripe old age of seventy-six. Steps such as these taken by the teacher, most often taking up his own personal time and resources, make it abundantly clear to the students that their opinions matter, they are cared for, and that they are an integral part of the educational process in the classroom. It would appear that by the steps he takes every day and throughout his career that Mr. Daniels has modeled his approach along the lines of the old adage that "students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care", an approach that is at the heart of the very positive attitudes expressed by his students.

Instructional Variety

"...other days we just go straight to 'Today In History' which is where we look at different things that happened on that day in years past." (interview with Dana)

"And sometimes he gives us papers and we have to color it in about things that happened in history like Valley Forge." (interview with Joseph)

"...we did a little role play where we were doing the Civil Rights. So we would pass out these packets and we would all get little characters to be." (interview with Albert)

"We had these cool 3D pictures of an underground railroad we had to piece together." (interview with Bryan)

"We get this piece of paper and it has 'before the video' and 'after the video' and it has a question in the middle and 'true or false'..." (interview with Angela)

"…we work with a partner and we go up to the table and we get the strips and then we answer the questions." (interview with Dorothy)

"I like when we get the guided reading activities because… it gives you part of the answer so it help you look for the answer…" (interview with Maria)

"I like the note taking… Because you can read them afterwards and it's easier on the quiz." (interview with Kate)

"It's fun… I mean the variety again - instead of doing all book work or all of something else." (interview with Nathaniel)

Another aspect that contributed to the significantly positive attitudes expressed by the student participants in this study was the variety of activities regularly employed by Mr. Daniels in his classroom. As seen above by the quotations from each of the participants, these activities range from the more traditional talk and chalk lecture and note taking sessions to cooperative learning through role playing and

the other more than ample opportunities that have been illustrated for the students themselves to steer the class in the direction of learning. By utilizing this wide ranging variety of instructional approaches, Mr. Daniels is revealing his constructivist leanings towards the teaching of American History. Said approach focuses primarily on the idea that teaching is more effective when the students are actively engaged in the process of learning as opposed to just passively receiving instruction. This design serves another purpose as well, one that appeared prominently in all three of the Breaking Ranks reports that were featured in the first chapter of this paper. That purpose is to achieve a level of instructional personalization in the classroom. This personalized approach, illustrated again by the sheer number and variety of quotes about the specific learning activities mentioned before, acknowledges that individual students differ in the ways that they learn best and attempts to structure content delivery in a way that best serves the unique needs of the students. Teachers such as Mr. Daniels believe that if they provide enough variety in the activities that they use in their classrooms they can tap into as much of their student's learning potential as possible. The research that has been published concerning this type of educational approach supports such attitudes. The numerous studies that have been conducted by those in the field such as Gokhan Bas have consistently illustrated that there is

a considerable amount of difference between the achievement levels of the students who have been educated by these multiple instructional strategies and the students who have received fewer and more traditional instructional methods (Bas 2010, p.176). While this collection of techniques appears to be key to the recipe for an effective learning experience, the purpose of this project was to focus solely on just one type of instructional strategy - the use of political cartoons to deliver specific historical content.

Modern Cartoons

> "…I know the kids are visually centered, and it just seems like a good hook for them… At least with cartoons there, if they're not writing, at least they're talking about them. I'm taking my attendance and I always hear 'Who is that?', 'What is that?', 'Isn't that this guy?' So I know they're thinking about it, which as a teacher, you've got to be happy with that. It's eliciting discussions on their own…" (interview with Mr. Daniels)

"Seeing stuff that's visual helps me learn better because seeing it and then hearing about it while you're looking at it, just helps it stick in your mind." (interview with Dana)

The positive responses to Mr. Daniels' approach to teaching American History continued for the most part when the conversations turned to focus their attention in a more detailed fashion on the use of political cartoons. These responses were divided into two separate categories, as Mr. Daniels' approach to using the cartoons in his class involved those from both the present as well as the past. By far, the cartoons from the present received a more favorable review from the student participants. When asked why they preferred the political cartoons from the present over their counterparts from our nation's more distant history the students commented on factors such as their use of vivid colors, their relative lack of clutter compared with those of the past, and the ease with which they were understood. The comparative ease the students described feeling when deciphering the symbolism and opinions in today's cartoons was determined to be in part a function of Mr. Daniels' regular emphasis on current events in his class. The students had a weekly homework assignment that involved locating and relating the facts of a major story of their own choosing from recent headlines. As many of the political cartoons they

were to analyze in class dealt with an almost identical list of events that they had chosen to report on for their assignment, the background knowledge they required to fully understand the political cartoon was, for the most part, already in place before they had even seen the image. The students generally responded favorably in regards to the regularly occurring current events assignment, with the exception of the to be expected grousing from middle school aged children about having too much homework to do. Many acknowledged that this was the first time in their lives when they actually followed events in the news, some even going so far as to recount tales of dining room table conversations with their parents that they could never have managed prior to their eighth grade school year. In this respect, as to the student's ability to carry on meaningful conversations about recent news events, Mr. Daniels received similar results to those mentioned by Sulsona (2004) in the prior pages of this report. Another common theme in regards to the more favorable opinions towards the cartoons from the present was their more easily understandable use of symbolism. The ease with which students understood this symbolism, a phenomenon dealt with in more detail later in this paper, again illustrates Werner's intertextuality and the cultural background knowledge regularly applied by students in the analysis of visual media. An early example of this occurred during the

use of a sample cartoon during the initial interview session. In the cartoon that was used, a bird appears in a nest on a tree branch waving a white flag (see Figure 4.1). When asked about the symbolism of the white flag, the students were able to identify it as a sign of surrender. Most related that this knowledge came in some way or another from a movie or favorite television program they had seen (one student not only specifically identified SpongeBob SquarePants as the source of this knowledge, but was able to recount minute details from the plot of the episode where he saw the white flag being waived by a character named Squidward Tentacles). This capacity to glean the

Figure 4.1 'Springtime in Syria'
by Randy Bish (April 9, 2012)

meaning of the symbols used in cartoons relative to content consumed through other forms of media is reminiscent of the Generation M report and its characterization of the twenty-first century media savvy student as well as the work of Minix (2004) that illustrated the power of political cartoons to tap into the visual elements of popular culture. A final note of importance from this initial conversation about the use of cartoons in their American History class was the extraordinary ability the students demonstrated in recalling details from current political cartoons they had seen several weeks before. Many of the student interviews took place in late May or early June. When asked to provide an example of a cartoon they could remember having seen in their class a number of the students commented on several "March Madness" cartoons, drawings that had borrowed imagery from the all too familiar 'brackets' used in the annual NCAA men's basketball championship tournament, that they had seen more than a month before (see Figure 4.2 for an example of a "March Madness" cartoon). Mr. Daniels himself recounted a rather remarkable tale about a former student returning to the middle school's campus one day for a visit, a day that happened to coincide with a lesson using political cartoons. The cartoon that was projected on the screen was an another excellent example of the "visual quoting" mentioned earlier by Werner and borrowed heavily from symbolism based on President George W.
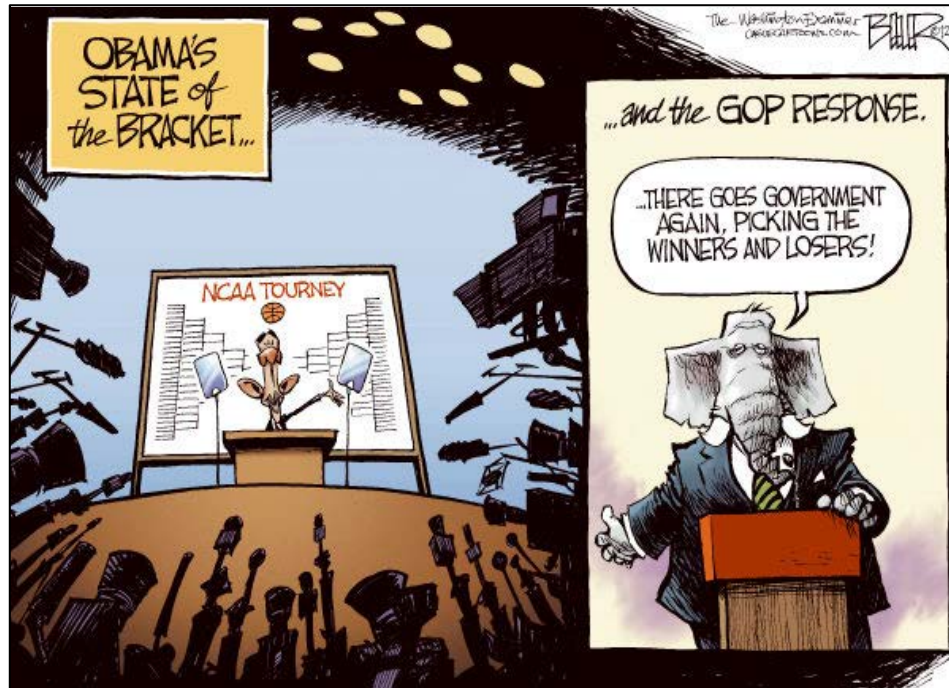
Figure 4.2 'March Madness'
by Nate Beeler (March 15, 2012)

Bush's 2003 "Mission Accomplished" press conference from the flight deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln. When the college freshman who was visiting that day saw the image, he was able to recount other political cartoons that had used similar imagery he had seen as a student in Mr. Daniels' class more than five years prior. This rather exceptional level of retention and understanding of both content and meaning from modern day political cartoons was not as favorable when compared to the conversations with students about cartoons from the past.

"…when they put the cartoons it's like, since I know more about what's going on now then what's happened in the past. I can relate more to them." (interview with Dorothy)

"Yes, when we do the current events and then sometimes… it's the cartoon that we learn about, I go home and my mom's talking… We just had the Trayvon Martin* one and my mom was talking about it and I'm like 'I know everything about that.' And we have an hour long conversation." (interview with Angela, *Note - Trayvon Martin was a seventeen-year-old African American teenager who was fatally shot by George Zimmerman on February 26, 2012, in Sanford, Florida.)

Cartoons from the Past

As stated previously, the political cartoons used in Mr. Daniels' class from the various time periods studied throughout American History did not receive the same favorable responses as those that dealt with current events. While students applauded the color, overall design, and sense of humor found in today's cartoons those from the past were viewed as dull, colorless, and very difficult to understand. In spite of these more negative attitudes that the students had towards

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political cartoons from the past, they nevertheless believed that the cartoons were a valuable tool for learning about America's history. Several students commented on how such an image accompanying a passage of historical text made the people and events described in said text easier to understand. Others noted the fact that the cartoons had the potential to portray points of view they might otherwise not encounter as a part of their history instruction. As with the conversations that took place dealing with the cartoons from the present (e.g., Randy Bish's flag waving robin), several cartoons from the past were shown to the student participants during the initial interview sessions. The images that were shown were Benjamin Franklin's 1754 'Join, or Die' cartoon, William White's 1779 'The Horse America, throwing his Master' (see Figure 4.3), and James Gillray's 'The American Rattlesnake' from 1782 (see Figure 4.4). This collection of cartoons was chosen for two distinct reasons. The first reason for their selection is that each of the cartoons mentioned dealt with a specific period of time covered as a part of the state mandated curriculum in their American History class, time periods mentioned prominently by Mr. Daniels in the interviews as subjects that he took considerable time and care in class going over with his students. Those specific periods of time covered by these images are, respectively, the French and Indian War, the events leading up to the American

Figure 4.3 'The Horse America, throwing his Master'
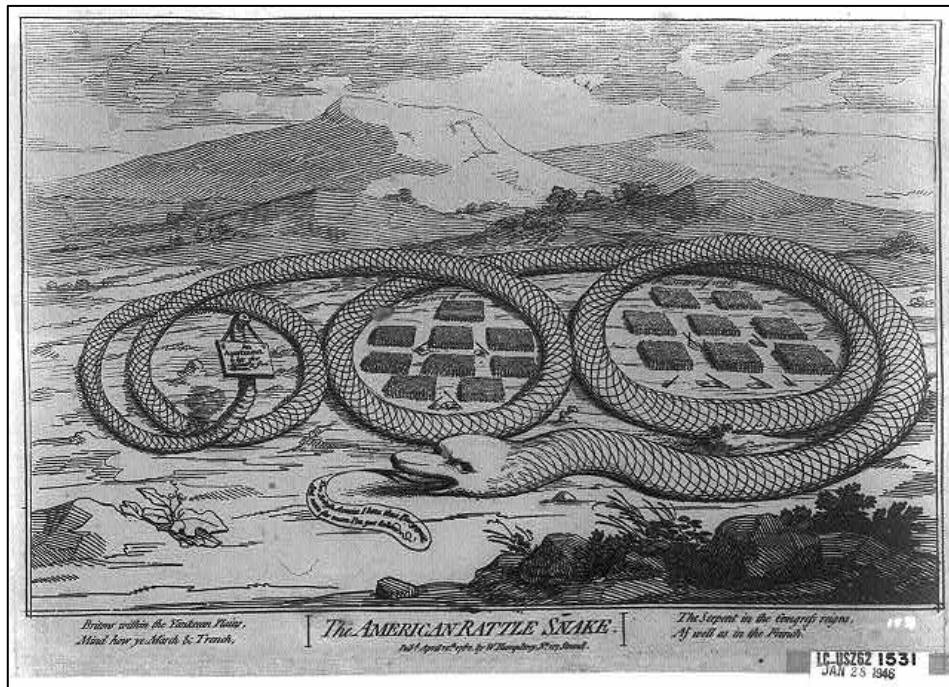Published by William White (August 1, 1779)

Figure 4.4 'The American Rattlesnake'
Cartoon by James Gillray (April 12, 1782)

Revolution, and the major battles of the American Revolution. These images were also selected because Mr. Daniels had identified each of these three as cartoons that had been presented and analyzed by the students in class at an earlier point in the school year. Two of the three images, Fanklin's snake and White's horse, are included in the pages of the course textbook and associated ancillaries while the third was sought out and downloaded by Mr. Daniels from the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog for use in class. In stark contrast to the impressive ability the students had to recall specific details from cartoons on current issues in the news, the students that were interviewed struggled mightily with these three from the past. Several students did not recognize the iconic segmented snake as an image they had seen before and at least one student misattributed the drawing to Thomas Jefferson. Even when prompted as to the symbolism found in the image, most of the students could not properly place the cartoon into its correct historical period. On a brighter note, the 'Join, or Die' cartoon was the only one of the three images where the students were able to consistently communicate the authors opinion from what was drawn (that the colonies could not survive if they did not unite in their efforts against a common foe). Few students could positively identify the rider of the horse 'America' as King George III, the reigning monarch of the British

Empire at the time of the revolution. Some of the students responded that they believed the rider in the image to be General Washington or another famous horseman, Paul Revere. The students were able to identify the horse as representative of the newly independent American states, although that knowledge was more a function of simply reading the caption at the bottom of the page than a demonstration of mastering historical content. None of the students could correctly recall the events of the Battle of Yorktown, the final major military engagement of the war and the one that immediately preceded Gillray's rattlesnake. Two students misidentified the nation that the United States struggled against to gain its freedom, naming Spain and France (both of whom were our military allies at the time) instead of England. The difficulties the student participants had in recalling significantly important historical information as well as their inability to intelligently discuss the imagery in these political cartoons harkened back to the dismal results of surveys from the likes of the McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum, the Roper organization, and the others mentioned in the preliminary pages of this report.

A Lack of Sympathy

"…cartoons from the present are easier to understand…
Because it uses a lot of recent, general comedy in them."
(interview with Maria)

"…from the past it's different so some of the things they
have in that, I don't use as often or I'm not as familiar
with as some of the things in modern cartoons." (interview
with Nathaniel)

To fully understand a political cartoon from any particular era of
American History, the reader must possess a sufficient understanding
of the techniques used by the cartoonists of that period, a knowledge
base of the specific people, places, and events from history, and a set
of critical thinking skills that they must be able to employ whenever
appropriate. The above quotations from Maria and Nathaniel illustrate
the difficulties that the students had with the symbolism found in the
cartoons of the past. Bal et al. (2009) touch on this difficulty in
defining the necessary conditions that must exist for a political cartoon
to effectively communicate its message to the reader. Among their list
of attributes all effective cartoons must possess is sympathy. By

sympathy the authors suggest that the reader must be able to relate or identify with the objects found within the image. If the reader is unable to relate or identify with the objects of the cartoon, he or she will most assuredly not understand its message. This seems to be especially true given the difficulties demonstrated by this particular set of student participants. With the constant barrage of television and internet content that students receive every day of their lives making it rather simple for them to recall and understand the symbolism found in the act of waving a white flag, perhaps the only way to achieve sympathy with the symbolism and make the cartoons of the past as easily understood as their counterparts from the present would be a similar bombardment with the necessary imagery or cultural references from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Few would argue that it would be somewhat unreasonable to expect a middle school classroom teacher, or a teacher at any other grade level for that matter, to follow such an approach so that students could master the ability to fully understand just this one type of primary source document. While the student's lack of understanding as to the symbolism found in cartoons from the past could be attributed to factors at least partially beyond the control of the classroom teacher, the second difficulty the students had with the cartoons, their inability

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to recall specific details from our nation's past, can be more directly linked to issues that can be affected by the instructor.

More than a Collection of Facts?

On more than one occasion during interviews for this project, Mr. Daniels stressed how in his class he was more desirous of creating a generation of independent thinkers as opposed to a collection of future contestants on the game show 'Jeopardy'. His philosophy is one that believes the information age that we live in can and should allow rote memorization to take a seat in the furthest row at the back of the school bus so as to leave time and space for an emphasis on research and critical thinking skills, a point made especially clear when Mr. Daniels described how he allows his students to use their history notebooks whenever they complete an assessment in class. This lack of emphasis on the ability to recall explicit historical facts is not a phenomenon unique to Mr. Daniels' American History classroom. In 2010 the American Enterprise Institute surveyed hundreds of randomly selected social studies teachers from across the United States. Their results showed that teaching facts was a low priority for social studies teachers when detailing their approach to their classrooms. Only 20% of respondents put teaching key facts, dates,

and major events at the top of their list of priorities for teaching. Teaching facts was also the last of the twelve items rated by teachers as absolutely essential to teach students: only 36% of teachers said it was absolutely essential to teach students "to know facts (e.g., locations of the fifty states) and dates (e.g., Pearl Harbor)." While an effective argument could be made on either side of the issue as to whether or not to emphasize more factual information in American History courses, it seems reasonable to conclude that by de-emphasizing knowledge of specific historical facts teachers would make it more difficult for their students to correctly decipher the meaning of political cartoons from the past. Critics of such an approach that emphasizes critical thinking to the detriment of a factual knowledge base, an approach championed by Mr. Daniels as well as others, would argue that the schools are symbolically teaching their history students how to fire a gun without supplying them with the ammunition they would need to hit their target.

Research Question #2

> How do middle school students gain a better understanding of specific historical content through the use of political cartoons?

Student Processes towards Interpreting Political Cartoons

> "Well on the side of the cartoon, he normally puts questions like 'What do you see?'… And then it's 'What does the text say?'… And then it asks 'What news stories do you think that this deals with?'… And then it would be 'What is the cartoonist trying to say?' (interview with Dana)

In addition to gathering information on student attitudes towards their American History class and the use of political cartoons, the first in the series of interviews was designed to get a sense of exactly how Mr. Daniels approached the process of having students analyze the cartoons. The above quote from Dana details a process thoroughly described in near identical fashion by all nine of the student participants. It lays out a spiraling questioning technique that guides the students step by step from a cursory description of the items contained in the image to the more difficult conclusion of interpreting the artist's intent. While the quote was specifically meant to describe the process as it related to a political cartoon from the present, the students all said that the steps for cartoons from both the past and the

present were exactly the same. It was paramount that this process was fully understood during the completion of the first of the three interviews as it was always the intent of the Principal Investigator to mimic these steps used in their class while conducting the second interviews, the sessions where students were expected to more clearly demonstrate their skills in analyzing a political cartoon. The procedure detailed here by the students follows closely along the same lines as those listed by Norman (2010) when he created an inventory of comprehension processes to describe the steps students used in understanding the graphics that accompanied the text used in an elementary Language Arts curriculum. His inventory includes a phrase called 'Label' where the students names the items in the graphic without elaborating beyond their names and 'Literal Description' where they describe what is explicitly depicted, steps identical to the purpose behind Mr. Daniels' primary question in analyzing cartoons 'What do you see?' Another step in Norman's process involves referring to the captions, labels, etc. used to assist in the comprehension of the image. The second question listed in the quote about Mr. Daniels' spiral, 'What does the text say?', again follows along this same path. The final questions in Mr. Daniels' approach, questions that range from the cartoon's connection to specific content covered in class to an interpretation of the cartoonist's opinion, round out the list of student

directions and closely mirror Norman's explanations of 'Inferential descriptions' and 'Infer author's purpose.' In spite of the almost word for word similarities to these two approaches, there is one very noticeable item lacking from Mr. Daniels' list of items. That missing piece is what Norman refers to as establishing a 'Connection-to-self'.

Making Connections

Norman's 'Connection-to-self' is described as a progression where a student comes to a better understanding of the meaning behind an image when they can make a personal connection to some aspect of their own life. This step implies an importance beyond simply making a connection to prior informational knowledge that might be associated with an image. This 'Connection-to-self' is very similar to Werner's (2004) theories on the subject of intertextuality. The keystone to Werner's ideas is that the interpretation of visual imagery is a phenomenon unique to each and every individual. None of these images, in his opinion, exist in a realm entirely free from context. Meanings arise from within the audience through an interaction between the image and the viewer's background experiences, knowledge, and interests brought to the image. Recall the modern cartoon mentioned earlier depicting the Syrian robin waving the white

flag. The student participant who related the image to an episode of SpongeBob Squarepants was utilizing their own collection of personal experiences to interpret the cartoonist's meaning. An additional example of Werner's notions on intertextuality took place during those first few interviews, albeit this time with a political cartoon from the past. When reviewing William White's 'The horse America…' one of the students commented briefly about a family trip where they had the opportunity to ride a horse. That experience allowed the student to correctly identify the riding crop as an essential element in the communication of the cartoonist's opinion. Seeing the weapons attached to the far end of the crop and relating it back to their own time spent atop a horse, the student was able to conclude that the artist did not agree with the way the British had been treating their American colonies. This connection to visual imagery on a more personal level as detailed by Norman and Werner and illustrated here by these examples will prove to be especially important in the next few pages as the student's skills in deciphering the meaning of specific political cartoons is described in more detail.

"So, a boat, looking like the Titanic… is sinking. There's a guy holding on to it and there's and elephant looking iceberg. I guess that represents Republicans…"

"It means that the Buffett Tax is going down or sinking…"

"…It's like, I guess, millionaires or something… they have to pay more tax than regular people."

"…so I guess the Buffett Tax which is the boat and Obama - they hit the iceberg which is the Republicans and they didn't like it, so now it's sinking and it's going down because the law didn't work." (interview with Dorothy)

The Paying a Fair Share Act of 2012, sponsored by Rhode Island Democrat Shelton Whitehouse and sixteen of his fellow senators (fifteen Democrats and one Independent), was introduced on the floor of the United States Senate on March 22, 2012. The bill was a legislative proposal, initiated by the administration of Barack Obama the previous year and given the nickname "The Buffett Tax", that would have implemented a 30% minimum effective tax rate on taxpayers annually reporting at least one million dollars of personal income. Sources indicated that the bill could have resulted in more

than thirty billion dollars in additional federal revenue each year and, according to the Congressional Research Service, would have affected less than one half of one percent of all American taxpaying citizens. The bill died due to a failed vote on a motion for cloture on April 16 of the same year. Cloture is required in the United States Senate for a bill to move past a filibuster or the threat of a filibuster and takes a three-

Figure 4.5 'Sink'
by LuoJie, China Daily News (April 19, 2012)

fifths (60%) vote. In the final vote for cloture the fifty-one 'Yeas' included forty-nine Democrats, one Republican, and one Independent. The forty-five 'Nays' included forty-four Republicans and one Democrat. For various reasons four members of the Senate, one Independent, one Democrat, and two Republicans, did not vote on the

cloture motion. The related bill in the Republican-controlled United States House of Representatives, introduced by Wisconsin Democrat Tammy Baldwin and seventy-two cosponsors, was referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means where it proceeded to die. It is the events of this bill that served as the backdrop for the 'Sink' image, drawn by LuoJie and published on April 19, 2012 (see Figure 4.5), that was selected to allow the student participants to demonstrate their skills in analyzing a modern day political cartoon.

Spiraling through the Image

The second in the series of interviews with student participants, the session dedicated to the actual analysis of specific political cartoons, was structured to follow the process of spiraling questions that Mr. Daniels employed on a regular basis in his classroom (refer to Appendix E for the second interview protocols). The first of those questions, where the viewer is asked to relay a description of the objects in the image without offering any interpretation, gave the students little difficulty. Every one of the students participants was able to identify the ship, the man, and the iceberg without fail (one student incorrectly referred to the iceberg as a 'glacier' but this was determined to be a function of language more than a

misunderstanding of symbolism as the student in question spoke English as a second language). In spite of this early success, or perhaps as a byproduct of the ease with which the students were able to accomplish this early goal, there was a tendency for some students to abandon the step by step approach and immediately jump to the final stages of the conversation where they attempted to interpret the artist's intent. In each of these instances, save one, the students engaged in a self-guided correction that put them back into their proper location on the spiraling path. It is also important to note that the students all identified the objects from the image in the same order: ship, man, and iceberg. None of the students could communicate why they consciously followed that pattern. It was presumed that since the order of the objects flowed from the left to the right across the image, the students were simply following the same pattern they would have used had they been asked to read a line of text from a page. This mimicking of reading behavior provided some measure of affirmation to the Principal Investigator for the use of Norman's work on processing graphics within a Language Arts context as a guide in structuring the approach to the student interviews.

As for the ability of the students to identify what each of the aforementioned objects was meant to represent, the results here were

considerably more mixed. While each and every one of the students was able to correctly identify the elephant-shaped iceberg as representing the Republican Party, a factor many attributed to the common use of that symbol in the cartoons from both the past and the present that they had seen throughout that year in their history class, there were quite a few problems that were run into when it came time to describe the man from the cartoon in greater detail. All of the students were able to accurately identify the man as either the captain or some other figure of authority by virtue of his uniform (not everyone used the word 'captain'). Several of the students had difficulty properly identifying the character in the image as U.S. President Barack Obama. Some attributed this to difficulties with clearly seeing his face because the image was too small, a problem addressed for some rather well by the 'zoom' feature on the digital version of the cartoon. However, even with the image enlarged to make the man appear as enormous as possible, a few students still were not able to identify the man until his name and title was later revealed by the Principal Investigator. There was additionally some degree of difficulty when it came to the step in the interview that dealt with identifying and understanding the labels or captions found in the cartoon. Only one of the student participants seemed familiar with the Democrat-led proposition of increasing taxes on the wealthiest

Americans known as the "Buffett Tax" that had appeared recently in the news (that one student's familiarity with the news story, as will be shown in the quote at the beginning of the next section, was determined to be a function of his father's strongly held opinions on the subject - opinions he regularly shared with his child). Each of the other participants was given the opportunity to read a brief excerpt from an article on the bill to provide them with the background knowledge that allowed for a better understanding of the symbolism used by the artist. For those who saw the excerpted passage, all were able to express an understanding of the "Buffet Tax" when they were through reading. Armed with that background knowledge, the students were able to successfully communicate their version of the artist's opinion. Those perceptions of the cartoonist's opinion varied only slightly from one another and fell into one of two major categories. The first category, the opinion held by the majority of the students, was that the artist blamed the Republicans in Congress for 'sinking' President Obama's plans to help the economy. The second category of ideas expressed in this interview focused more on Obama than the Republicans, expressing thoughts on how he had captained the disastrous trip and failed in his efforts to pass the tax. When asked their own opinions on the idea of raising taxes on the wealthiest Americans, again the group was split in two. About half agreed with

the idea of asking the richest among us to pay more while others felt it was unfair to make different rules for different people.

> "Because, as my dad says, because he is a Republican, he doesn't like the idea of that. He says rich people make jobs. You won't have a rich person - take away their money - and then they won't be able to have a job to pay the poor person…" (interview with Albert)

Personalizing the Material

The manner in which students describe their own opinions about events ripped from today's headlines or those from the distant past and the influence of parents and teachers on those views is worthy of an entire investigation of its own. This project was more concerned with the processes involved with a student's ability to analyze a political cartoon. As was illustrated in the prior passage, each of the student participants was quite capable of discerning the meaning behind the collection of objects in the image. The only shortfall demonstrated was a deficiency on some of their parts in the area of background knowledge, a difficulty quickly addressed and dismissed. While each of the steps outlined is important in understanding the

cognitive processes involved with political cartoons, they represent only a fraction of what was really happening. The portion that is missing from the tale, an element not readily identifiable from the protocols that were generated for the second interview, is again what Werner and Norman respectively refer to as intertextuality and the 'Connection-to-self'. Two distinct occurrences of these phenomena have already been detailed in this paper. The first was the image of the Syrian robin waving the white flag. The second was found in William White's 'The horse America…' On both occasions students drew upon personal experiences and what Werner calls 'cultural capital'. In each of these two instances, the personal life experiences of the viewer had a direct impact on their ability to draw meaning from an image. The 'Sink' cartoon used in the second student interviews represents the third and perhaps strongest occurrence of this phenomenon in that it happened to one degree or another with the entire participant population. Without any prompting from the Principal Investigator or hesitation on their part, every student participant used the word 'Titanic' to describe the sinking ship in the cartoon. Upon the utterance of that single word a barrage of tales began to flow. One student discussed having seen the 1997 James Cameron epic about the ship's disastrous maiden voyage "like fifty times." One particular female participant shared her enduring adoration for the film's lead

actor, Leonardo DiCaprio. Another only begrudgingly expressed positive emotions about the film, after describing having been "dragged" into the theatre by his mother to see it. Others had not seen the film but instead discussed having seen documentaries or participating in conversations with peers and adults about the ill-fated ship. A great deal of these tales of media saturation can be attributed to the re-release of the film and countless other stories published in honor of the one hundredth anniversary of the ship's sinking. The 'Sink' cartoon itself was published just four days after the anniversary, a fact that can hardly be waved off as mere coincidence (for the record, the sinking of the Titanic is one of those iconic images used as 'visual quoting' on many occasions - a quick internet search yielded dozens of similar uses of the symbolism from many different times during the past several years). Whatever the reason, each and every participating student entered the second interview session with a cache of personal experiences that were reflexively released immediately upon seeing the image. These experiences allowed the 'Connection-to-self' phase of graphical analysis to take place with all of the interviewed subjects. That connection influenced their individual experience with the image in a very unique and constructive way. The ability of today's artists to tap into the experiences of their audience may explain why these cartoons from the present received a

considerably more favorable attitudinal response from the students. If indeed that connection explains the positive attitude and relative ease with which the students grasped the meaning behind the 'Sink' cartoons and its partners from the present, it would also explain the negativity and difficulties the students had with political cartoons from the past.

Analyzing a Cartoon from the Past

"I see small people doing something to a giant."

"They're trying to get something out of his mouth? His wife and children."

"People are fighting over anti-slavery or pro-slavery."

"Looks like the buildings are on fire, people are fighting, that looks like it's on fire, yes it does. She is trying to get away it looks like, civil war looks like it's going on." (interview with Bryan)

On the night of May 24, 1856 a group of men led by anti-slavery proponent John Brown traveled across the eastern region of the Kansas Territory. The men had vengeance on their mind. Brown, who would go on to be remembered more for his 1859 raid on the United

States Armory and Arsenal at Harpers Ferry Virginia than for the events of this night, was angered by the events that had unfolded only days before in the town of Lawrence. There pro-slavery forces had sacked the town and scattered its abolitionist settlers. Brown and his men had these events fresh in their minds when they approached the cabin of James Harris. Harris had several house guests that evening and each was thoroughly questioned about Lawrence and their stand on the issue of slavery by Brown and his men. In each instance, the questioning took place with the interviewee positioned perilously at the pointed end of a sword. One of those guests, a pro-slavery advocate by the name of William Sherman whose responses to questioning had not satisfied their late-night visitors, was lead off to the edge of a nearby creek and hacked to death by the men with their swords. Sherman's death was just one of five attributed to Brown and his men on this particular night (Reynolds 2006, p.177). The violence by Brown and his men in what came to be known as the Pottawatomie Massacre was only one of many examples of violence in the territory at this time period that came to be known as "Bleeding Kansas." The events sparked such an emotional response across the nation that it even led to violence on the floor of Congress when South Carolina Democrat Preston Brooks entered the Senate chambers and physically assaulted Massachusetts Republican Charles Sumner with his cane.

Most historians attribute the violence in the Kansas Territory and the associated events to a number of circumstances, most notably the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854. Prior to the passage of this bill, slavery had been excluded from every part of the former Louisiana Territory north of the parallel 36°30' north. Authored by the Democratic Senator from Illinois Stephen A. Douglas, the Kansas-Nebraska Act removed these restrictions on slavery and replaced them with a process of popular sovereignty that would allow voters in the territory to decide whether slavery would be allowed. This provision set off a fury of movement where settlers, both for and against slavery, from almost every state in the nation converged on Kansas so as to be present and therefore have an influence on the final vote on the issue. This confluence of rabid pro and anti-slavery forces in the territory made the violence the likes of which describe above by Brown and others all too predictable. In fact, these acts are seen as many as the true first shots of what would eventually be known as the Civil War, by far the bloodiest conflict in our nation's history. It is the events of this time period; the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the potential spread of slavery to the newly formed states in the union, and the associated violence that resulted from this movement that provide the historical perspective to the political cartoon from our nation's past that was used with students during the second interview.

That cartoon was John L. Magee's August 1856 image 'Forcing Slavery Down the Throat of a Freesoiler.'

A Lack of Context

As mentioned beforehand, Mr. Daniels begins his year-long approach with using political cartoons in his American History classroom by first introducing his students to modern day cartoons. He uses this approach because it allows him to introduce the steps involved with cartoon analysis using materials and topics that the students are more likely to be comfortable with. Since Mr. Daniels' ultimate goal is for the students to master the skills and abilities necessary to understand cartoons from both the past and the present, the technique of step by step spiraling questioning is the same for cartoons from both time periods. As such, the Principal Investigator began this portion of the second interview with the students attempting to identify and describe the objects, captions, and labeling found in the cartoon. The students, much in the same way as when they were working with an image from the present, had little to no difficulty identifying the portion of the image with the four smaller men forcing open the mouth of a much larger man that had been tied down. Interestingly, in stark contrast to the process described with the

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'Sink' cartoon from modern times where the descriptions followed a pattern of left to right similar to the process of reading, the students almost universally identified the larger man in the center of the image first. It is possible that it was the intent of the artist to draw the attention of the viewer to this man by his placement in the center of the image, a placement that might be indicative of the artists measure of this larger man's importance to the issue, but it is impossible to know for sure without additional information on the image or being able to communicate with the artist directly. None of the students commented on the possibility that the larger man's location at the center of the image might be connected to the artist's opinion on the topic. Continuing with the other figures at the forefront of the cartoon, more than half of the student participants included in their descriptions of the objects a mentioning of the differences in dress between the smaller men and their larger prisoner. Some attributed this to a difference in wealth while others guessed that perhaps the well-dressed men were politicians. Every one of the student participants used the same word, 'slave', to describe the smaller dark-skinned man that was being forced down the larger man's throat. Similarly, they were all able to clearly (with the assistance of the iPad's zooming capabilities) identify the scenes in the background on the top left and the right of the cartoon as images of violence and death.

"…trying to make the North have slavery but obviously they don't want it because he is pinned down and it doesn't seem like he wants it… Because his arms are tied down and he is getting his hair pulled." (interview with Nathaniel)

While there was virtually no trouble at all with the identification and description of the objects in the cartoon, the captions and labels were not as easy for the students to understand. The title of the cartoon, portrayed prominently across the bottom of the image, provided the greatest amount of assistance for the students in grasping the meaning behind the drawing. The use of the word 'SLAVERY' not only identified the most important aspect of the artist's intent, it also assisted the students with placing the image within its proper historical context. With this information, and without being told the date of the cartoon's publication, every student was able to identify the cartoon as being from the time period just before or right at the start of the Civil War. Even those who mistakenly identified the image as having been published after the first shots of the war had been fired, perhaps distracted in their conclusion by the images of violence contained in the background of the cartoon, were off by less than five years. The use of the word 'SLAVERY' also induced within the

students a recollection of the struggles over the 'peculiar institution', the desire of politicians to maintain a balance in the number of free and slave states and thus a balance of power in Congress, and the role it played in the coming battles between the North and the South. While some parts of the cartoon's title were helpful, others were considerably less so. The use of the term 'FREESOILER' confused most of the students. None of the participants interviewed could identify the term as signifying the larger man's membership in the Free Soil Party, a short-lived political organization active during the U.S. presidential elections of 1848 and 1852. This was especially troubling considering that it had been verified in follow up discussions with Mr. Daniels that the subject of the Free Soil Party was covered in the assigned readings from the textbook and had been discussed with the students on more than one occasion in his classroom. In spite of their lack of knowledge about the Free Soil Party, the students were nevertheless able to identify that group as being one comprised primarily of members who would be described as abolitionists (a term used and defined correctly by several students). When asked about this conclusion drawn by the students, they each in some way or another commented on the larger man being tied down while having a slave rammed down his throat as the source of their accurate conclusion. After initially discussing the labeling at the bottom of the image, most students moved next to the

speech bubble located at the top center of the cartoon. All of the students were able to read the words clearly, mentioned here only because the students had commented on how this speech bubble was much easier to read than most found in cartoons from the past, and most associated it with the images of violence contained in the background. In spite of this similar assumption by all, there was some disagreement about the figures found behind the primary images. Most believed that the woman and child fleeing the burning building were the family of the larger man, although there was no consensus as to the identities of the gun-wielding men who appear to have set the building aflame. There was also disagreement about the man to the far right, with some students deciding he had been murdered by Southerners looking to spread slavery and others believing he had been killed by Northerners trying to put it to an end. The last bit of labeling, the names attached to the collection of smaller men and the 'DEMOCRATIC PLATFORM', only added to the confusion of the students. None of the participants could define the term 'platform' as being a list of principles held by a political party much less the meaning behind the geographical locations depicted on its planks. As for the four men whose names appear in rather small print below their images in the cartoon, only the name of James Buchanan was recognized by the students as having served as a U.S. President

(although not president at the time of the image's publication). The students failed to recognize the name of President Franklin Pierce, the occupant of the White House during this historical period and the man who signed the Kansas-Nebraska Act into law, and Stephen Douglas, the statesman who almost single-handedly authored this notorious piece of legislation and whose debates with the future President Abraham Lincoln on topics including the spread of slavery during the 1858 political campaign for the U.S. Senate seat from Illinois are the stuff of legends. The students were equally ignorant as to the identity of the final Lilliputian figure located on the far right of the cartoon, U.S. Senator Lewis Cass. Cass, a leading spokesman for the idea of having voters in the territories determine whether or not to allow slavery instead of having the U.S. Congress decide, served numerous roles throughout his political career including Secretary of State during the Buchanan administration. Although equally illustrative of the systemic lack of information knowledge across this collection of students, it would be understandable to forgive them for this final omission as the importance of Senator Cass in the grand scheme of this time period has not exactly been the emphasis of historians throughout the years.

Troubles with the Past

Although the captions and labels gave the students difficulties, those difficulties were nothing compared to the troubles the students experienced demonstrating a more detailed understanding of the specific historical events that were taking place at the time of the cartoon's publication. While the students were able to roughly place the cartoon into its proper period of American History and identify the Freesoilers as an abolitionist group, there was little else the students could recall about the major events of the era. There was no mention of the Kansas-Nebraska Act or the accompanying violence of 'Bleeding Kansas' throughout the interviews. Again, it was confirmed with Mr. Daniels that the specific events of this time period had indeed been discussed in class and were also the subject of several at home and in-class assignments. This situation failed to markedly improve even after the students were afforded the opportunity to refresh their memories by perusing the appropriate chapters from their American History textbook. Especially troubling was the fact that for most of the students who participated in this study the classroom discussions and activities covering this content took place only one or two weeks prior to the second interviews. While the amount of time that had lapsed between content instruction and review could have been to blame for

the student's inability to recall specific information from Franklin and Gillray's snakes or White's horse (those events had been studied during the earlier parts of the first semester while the interviews took place near the end of the school year), that same excuse seemed inappropriate here. Part of the blame for the troubles experienced by the students could be reasonably placed at the feet of Mr. Daniels and his overt rejection of rote memorization in his history classroom, but it is also possible that there was another factor at play. That factor may have been the student's inability to form a personal connection with the material at hand. When LouJie's 'Sink' cartoon, with its visual quoting of the Titanic disaster, was discussed at length with the students there was a noticeable level of ease and enthusiasm that simply did not repeat itself when the interviews turned to the image from the past. While personal tales of knowledge or experiences with the imagery used in the cartoon flowed freely and energetically when discussing the news item in the modern cartoon, the student's personalities went mute with the second image. This was somewhat unexpected, as the artist from the past utilized a similar scheme of visual quoting in his cartoon that was expected by the Principal Investigator to assist the students in their understanding of the image. That 'quoting' took the form of images drawn from Jonathan Swift's 'Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World, in Four Parts. By

Lemuel Gulliver, First a Surgeon, and then a Captain of Several Ships', better known as 'Gulliver's Travels' (see Figure 4.6).
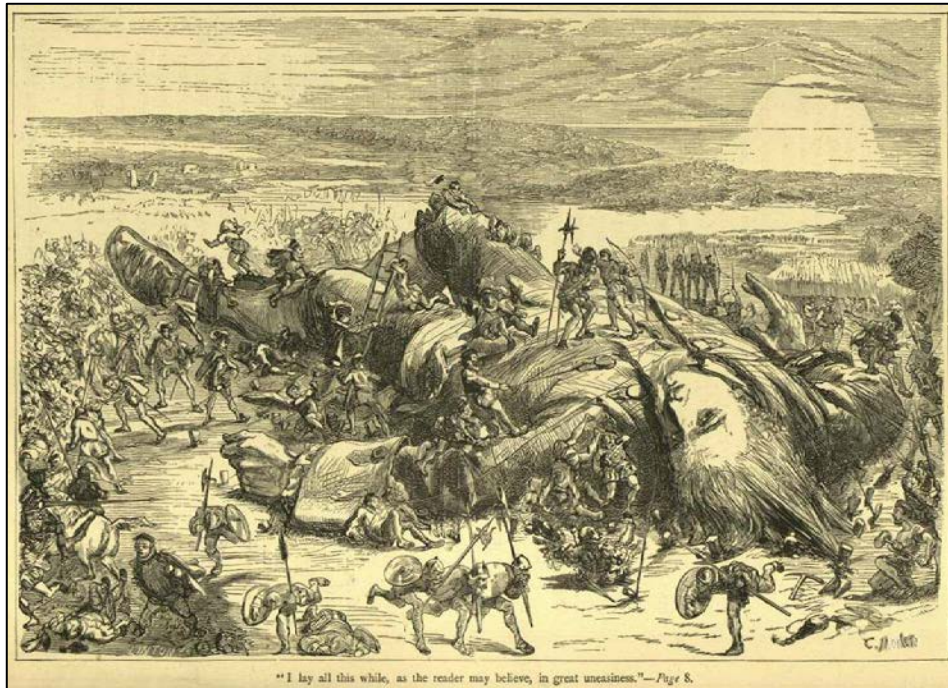

Figure 4.6 'I lay all this while, as the reader may believe...'
by Thomas Morten (1865)

A Literary 'Giant'?

Published first in 1726 and immediately popular, 'Gulliver's Travels' is widely considered to be a classic of English literature and has never been out of print. The novel has impacted almost every facet of popular culture since its first printing, spawning countless imitations and adaptations including those for both radio, television, and film (the most recent examples of this being a 2010 major motion picture staring Jack Black and the ad campaign for the 2013 Acura

RDX crossover automobile - see Figures 4.7 and 4.8). Swift's tale of adventure has even left its mark on our lexicon, with terms such as 'yahoo' and 'lilliputian' having their origins with the pages of his work. It is the diminutive group of islanders encountered by Gulliver whose name supplies the etymological beginning of the second of these two terms that provides the imagery for Magee's cartoon. The scene in part one of Swift's novel depicting Gulliver washing up on the shore of Lilliput and his subsequent capture by the inhabitants while asleep could rightfully be sighted as the inspiration for the cartoon used with the students. When asked about their knowledge of 'Gulliver's Travels' the students overwhelmingly shrugged in confusion. Puzzled by this response (none of the students admitted to having read the book and only one claimed to have seen the most recent film), the Principal Investigator sought clarification from several middle school Language Arts instructors. From those conversations with classroom teachers it was determined that 'Gulliver's Travels', if it is to be a part of classroom instructional plan at all, would most probably be limited in its use to classrooms at the high school level and beyond. Those same teachers indicated that they felt it would be unlikely to find a current middle school student who had read the novel on their own, a fact they most likely attributed to its noticeable lack of "wizards and vampires" (this statement by the Language Arts teachers is somewhat

Figure 4.7 Movie Poster - Gulliver's Travels
(2010, 20th Century Fox)

Figure 4.8 'Chariot'
Screenshot - 2013 Acura RDX commercial

inaccurate as Gulliver did, in fact, encounter magicians during his adventures on the island of Glubbdubdribb). This lack of a personal connection to the material appeared to have inhibited the student's ability to grasp the material in the cartoon beyond the basic identification and understanding of its most obvious elements. Again the work of Werner and his ideas on the concept of intertextuality appear to be at play in these circumstances. The cultural capital required to fully grasp the metaphor used by the artist and completely understand the opinion expressed in his drawing simply did not exist within the students. Perhaps this problem could have been remedied by the reading of a passage or two from Swift's novel or even reviewing a clip from any one of its television or film adaptations prior to examining the cartoon, but such steps could hardly be expected of an already time-constrained classroom teacher for each and every instance where a political cartoon was utilized for classroom purposes (Mr. Daniels did express one particular instance where he employed such a technique when using a modern cartoon in class - he showed a brief clip from a 'Three Stooges' short to assist students in their understanding of the ridicule used by an artist on a figure currently in the news). Whatever the possible remedy may be, it is somewhat obvious that a lack of relevant cultural capital from the time period

being studied had an inhibiting impact on a student's ability to fully grasp the unique perspectives of political cartoons from the past.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Limitations

Summary of Findings

The statistical and anecdotal evidence provided by the reports and quotes in the first two chapters of this work leave little doubt that the young people who are currently enrolled in or are the recent products of the educational system in America are appallingly deficient in their knowledge and understanding of the important people and events that make up our nation's history. Not quite as apparent or agreed upon is the course of action that must be taken to lead the next generation of students away from this blight of historical ignorance and towards an improvement in this area, thereby securing the successive waves of educated citizenry necessary to ensure a brighter future for this country. Whatever the choices that are made along the trail towards the improvement of history education, one thing seems to be abundantly clear. For any plan to succeed all of the stakeholders involved in the decision making process must have a crystal clear understanding of the day to day failures and triumph

that take place in the social studies classrooms across America. The expression "where the rubber meets the road" was never more appropriately applied than in reference to these miniature learning laboratories and it would be foolish to expect anything but a continuation of the aforementioned abysmal pattern without a proper grasp of the myriad dynamics and variations that exist in these classrooms. This paper's primary aim was to thoroughly describe the use of one specific educational tool in just such a classroom and to provide as many insights as possible so as to allow the figurative laying down of one of the first pavers in what is hoped to eventually be a path to success that both policy makers and individual classroom teachers alike could follow.

The first major insight to appear from the investigation into the unique circumstances of Mr. Daniels' class was the decidedly positive attitude displayed by the students when asked to describe their assessment of the materials and activities that were employed throughout the time they were in their 8th grade American History classroom. It was derived through an analysis of the interview transcriptions that this positive attitude, a phenomenon that contrasted most of the published data on student's attitudes towards their history classes, was a function of several factors related directly

to actions taken by the teacher in the classroom. A major point among those factors was an instructional approach that was designed and implemented by the classroom teacher with the distinctive learning characteristics of the students in mind. The obvious time devoted to and effort employed by Mr. Daniels in implementing the variety of activities meant to address the individual needs of students that regularly appeared as a part of instruction as well as the feelings student had of being active participants in the planning and learning processes in class fostered a rapport between teacher and student that allowed this positive attitude to evolve and thrive. While the needs of Mr. Daniels' children could hardly be expected to be an exact match for the educational requirements of the country's student population as a whole, it would seem to be a reasonable assertion for most to conclude that a similar approach of instructional personalization and active engagement of students in the process of learning utilized by history teachers in other geographical locales would yield some degree of positive results in improving student's attitudes towards history as an academic subject. It would be equally logical to deduce that if such an improvement in student attitudes towards their experiences in the American History classroom were to take place that said attitudinal improvement would at some near point in time be followed by a similar advancement in academic performance.

The remaining insights uncovered as a part of this report all revolved around the use of one particular educational tool that regularly appeared among the variety of instructional activities in the classroom being investigated. That tool was the political cartoon, chosen by Mr. Daniels as a part of his larger plan of instructional personalization to appeal to what he believed to be a visually oriented population of students that visited his classroom throughout the school day. As an aside and somewhat related to this perceived learning proclivity was the unintended insight into student's abilities in using technology that revealed itself during the interview process. The participants demonstrated a noticeable ease when interacting with the digital versions of the political cartoons that were presented to them during the study via tablet computer. This would appear to support not only Mr. Daniels' assertion as to the predominant learning style in his classroom but also the conclusions about the twenty-first century learner drawn by the studies mentioned in the early pages of this report. The cartoons employed by Mr. Daniels were more or less equally divided between those that covered events currently in the news and those that populated the newspapers and other media of the more distant past. The use of these images from the past and present was designed by the teacher to both introduce and review the material covered in class as well as to foster informed debates and a wide

range of critical thinking skills among the students. As was the case for almost all of the activities mentioned during the interview process, the students in Mr. Daniels class had a positive attitude towards the use of cartoons and universally expressed an understanding of their value in the process of learning American History. While the students were unanimously positive in their review of the use of political cartoons, their ability to demonstrate their skills in deciphering historical meaning from these images of the past and present was considerably more disparate.

The political cartoons used in Mr. Daniels' class from the present, employed in part as an effort to emphasize the civic responsibility of every American citizen to stay informed of current events, were viewed by the students in a very positive light. The overall effectiveness of achieving that particular portion of civic responsibility was definitively confirmed when students recounted to the Principal Investigator tales of mature and intelligent conversations outside of the classroom with both adults as well as peers on a wide range of topics that recently appeared in the news. Genuine feelings of enthusiasm were conveyed by the students upon entering Mr. Daniels' classroom when they knew that these cartoons would be a part of that day's lesson. The students also displayed a remarkable ability to recall

and describe specific details from present day political cartoons that had appeared in class many months before, thus adding some measure of confirmation to their teacher's assertion that these students generally leaned towards a preference in visual forms of learning. The students were equally remarkable in displaying a higher order skill set when progressing through a series of teacher created spiraling questions about the cartoons that eventually lead to a perception beyond the mere recounting of the more obvious objects and facts that populated the image and instead to a deeper understanding of the artist's intent. In many instances, the ability of the students to decipher the meaning behind these more recent drawings was determined to be more than simply a factor of the timeliness of the events they intended to lampoon. The ease with which the students handled these modern cartoons was considerably impacted by their possession of what researchers refer to as 'cultural capital.' This in depth knowledge of the modern cultural references and humorous allusions made regularly in the political cartoons of today allowed the students to make a personal connection with the material that lead to a much deeper understanding of the image as a whole.

While the interviews with the student participants on the subject of current political cartoons were positive and productive, the

conversations were decidedly different when the subject changed to political cartoons from the past. The positive attitudes and energetic enthusiasm that had filled the room quickly vanished without a trace when the images from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries appeared. Whereas students could recall minute information concerning modern cartoons from an earlier point in their history course, they could not recall the facts or details from images of the past that were presented during similar time frames in the school year. The problems that the students experienced recalling political cartoons from the past they had already experienced continued when they were asked to provide an analysis of said images, in spite of the fact that the process of spiraling questioning was identical to that of the steps used with the modern drawings. A significant factor related to the difficulties experiences by the students was their lack of specific content knowledge, a result of the classroom teacher's reluctance to emphasize the commitment to memory of the important names, dates, and events throughout the entirety of his American History course. An equal or greater role in the problems students had with the cartoons from the past was their lack of the previously mentioned relevant cultural capital. The same knowledge of people and events from today's cultural milieu that allowed a connection with the images from the present on a personal level did not exist with the images of the

past and as a result the students could not fully understand the image from the perspective of the artist or any other person living in the moment it was created. This inability to personally relate to a particular period of time and make what researchers call a 'connection-to-self' inhibited the students ability to reach a deeper understanding of the images from the past that they had seen.

Conclusions

The academic research on the subject of using primary source documents in the American History classroom clearly indicates their value in fostering an improvement in both content knowledge as well as critical thinking skills. These materials have also proven their value in possibly ending the tyrannical reign of power that textbook publishers have held over the historical content presented by their works over the years while providing opportunities for students to experience more authentic and challenging learning activities. Newly designed curriculum standards and what appears to be a national movement towards the Common Core Standards would indicate that activities utilizing such documents will occur more frequently in the classrooms of the very near future. The multitude of findings on the visually oriented, media savvy twenty-first century student would

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indicate that the political cartoon has the potential to provide students with one such primary source capable of appealing to their learning strengths. In spite of the positive attitudes students expressed concerning the use of political cartoons in class, tremendous difficulties were exhibited when students tried to provide a detailed analysis of the artist's opinion on the subject dealt with in the images of the past. Based on the information gathered from this particular collection of student participants, a teacher would need to improve upon a student's (and perhaps their own) knowledge of the cultural influences of the relevant period of time being studied to significantly improve upon that set of skills. Effectively accomplishing the aforementioned establishment of a collection of background knowledge in the relevant cultural capital needed to make a deeper connection to the material would appear to be an intensive, time-consuming endeavor most teachers would be reluctant to take on. This is the most likely explanation as to why at the outset of this study it was so very difficult to locate a collection of teachers that routinely utilized political cartoons as a part of instruction in their American History classrooms. Even the teacher who was the focus of this study, whose unique approach in dedicating a significant amount of class time to the use of political cartoons from both past and present formulated the basis of this project's case study approach, had troubles creating this

foundation of cultural knowledge from the past within his collection of students. Unless something were to dramatically change in regards to the myriad forces exerting claims on the precious few instructional minutes a classroom teacher has to work with on any given school day, it would seem unlikely that today's teachers would be able to give these political cartoons the time and efforts necessary to realize their full potential and make them a truly effective tool in the American History classroom.

Study Limitations

Any case study approach to research has the potential to provide a rich and holistic description of a phenomenon through the detailed descriptions of individuals or small groups. Such was the goal of the efforts detailed within the chapters of this report. In spite of this capacity to describe a situation through the lived experiences of participants, this type of research does have its limitations. Primary among these problems are the difficulties involved with the data and the processes used in its collection. At their heart, case studies rely on the ability of participants to provide detailed descriptions and precise information on the topic being investigated. As such, the data collection process can and very often times is somewhat restricted by

the capacity of those participants to recollect said experiences. It is quite possible that when using this type of approach that specific pieces of information important to the study may be left out. This would seem to be especially true with this particular study, given the nature of middle school aged children in general and this particular group's demonstration of an inability to recall learned information. Another difficulty with the case study involves the interpretation of this potentially flawed data that has been collected. This data set, while somewhat sufficient in describing the experiences of this restricted sample of participants, cannot provide the explicit cause-and-effect explanations that one might expect from the controlled conditions of a laboratory. This inability to draw causal conclusions from the rather small set of collected data also fails in its ability to rule out the potential alternate explanations of the phenomenon that may exist. It is entirely possible that the difficulties the students exhibited with cartoons from the past are limited to just those images used during the interview portions of this study. An altogether different set of data may have been collected had another set of political cartoons been chosen. It is likewise possible that the success students had might not have been duplicated with a different compilation of drawings from the present. Each of these problems serves to add fuel to an additional difficulty with this approach, generalizability. The unique experiences

of Mr. Daniels and the students in his 8th grade American History class with this particular set of political cartoons may not accurately reflect the attitudes and behavior of most teachers and students in similar situations and are therefore applicable to just this small group. The final difficulty with this case study approach lies with the Principal Investigator himself. The very nature of this process leaves itself wide open to the potential of a conscious or unconscious bias displayed by the Principal Investigator, from the manner in which questions are asked of participants to the format chosen to share the results. As the Principal Investigator of this particular study is himself an 8th grade American History teacher who routinely uses political cartoons in his classroom, it is quite possible that he may have had an agenda in mind when creating and executing this study. Each of these limitations should remain forefront in the mind of the reader as they peruse the pages of this final report. While each of these difficulties may have indeed had an impact on the process as a whole, it is still hoped that the information within these pages rings true enough that researchers and other professionals in the field could empathize with the findings and that this single case may assist in advancing American History instruction if even only by a single step.

Recommendations

Regardless of the apparent limitations of this study there is a sufficient amount of information, explicit and implied, contained within these pages to elicit future dialogues and possible changes to move us farther along on a path towards improving education in the American History classroom. Said pages include information that could be applied to a variety of topics in the field of education. First and perhaps most prominent on that list would be the topic of curriculum. Based on what was observed with this particular collection of students, it could be argued that the curriculum for this middle school American History course covered a period of time far too vast for any opportunities at serious historical contemplation. A redesigned curriculum set on covering a briefer period of time across our nation's story would offer teachers the opportunity to delve more deeply into the unique context of that collection of historical moments. That additional time could be used on a more frequent and thorough examination of primary source documents, including but not exclusively limited to the political cartoon, to foster a deeper appreciation of the journey that our nations has taken to this point. Such opportunities would allow a teacher to appropriately cover the important events of our nation's past without the fear of days passing

on a calendar hanging over their heads like the sword of Damocles. If such a change were to take place it would cause a ripple effect through the entire education system. Curriculums designed to cover fewer years would necessitate the creation of more courses in American History. As the pupil progression plans in school districts across the nation are already somewhat limited in their flexibility, these changes would require school boards as well as state legislatures to refocus some of their educational priorities. It would also require a reshuffling of priorities among educational leaders, their ever growing list of critics, as well as the individual classroom teacher.

Return to the list of reports on the dismal performance of students in demonstrating their knowledge of American History. The majority of questions from the surveys that make up these reports ask for very specific facts, usually in the form of fill in the blank or multiple choice questions. If we are to improve in the area of American History education we must take a long hard look at what we believe to be the most important aspects of our content. Which is more important, knowing the dates of the Battles of Trenton and Princeton during the American Revolution or understanding the desperation of George Washington after the humiliating defeat handed to him in New York and the changes in both attitudes and support that took place after

these engagements in New Jersey? If we truly value learning, then we must place a greater importance on the second of these two items and refuse to allow ourselves to be drawn into arguments about the decline of American History education based on studies that fail to emphasize what is truly important to know about our nation's past. It is true that basic facts are important in their ability to create a foundation for learning, but they cannot be the sole tool of evaluation when gauging the proficiency of both teachers and students in the classroom. Changes would also be necessary in the ways that teachers are prepared for the classroom. If expectations are to change in the ways students are required to demonstrate their knowledge of history, then the expectations of teachers must be adjusted along similar lines. Classrooms must be rearranged into places of serious historical investigations and debates, as opposed to a collection of factory-like cubicles filled with children copying notes from the board. In class and homework assignments must redesigned to foster critical thinking and not the same old regurgitation of facts from a reading passage in the textbook. Ancillary materials, like political cartoons and other primary source documents, must be added to the arsenal of education and employed on a regular basis to assist in bringing about this change.

Many of the thoughts and suggestions made here are based on the unique experiences of the Principal Investigator and this one group of student participants. It would be ludicrous to assume that a repeat of this study with a different group of participants would yield identical results. However, if one was interested in advancing an agenda that the use of primary source documents such as political cartoons can and should be used more frequently in the American History classroom; studies such as this one should be replicated. A replication of these steps would allow the data to build in order to reveal the trends on a much larger scale. If such replications were to support the assertions here, that additional time and effort must be spent establishing a solid base of cultural and historical background knowledge for primary sources to have their greatest possible impact, then that data could be presented to policymakers in the hope that they would take a serious look at recommendations for change such as those mentioned in this section. To further investigate the processes involved with political cartoons, future investigations could modify the teaching practices of classroom instructors using this tool and perhaps support the argument for a more thought provoking educational experience as opposed to the panicked footrace we sometimes see today. Regardless of the results that future investigations into this area may yield, continued research into the ability of students to

obtain a deeper understanding of history through investigations into primary source documents like political cartoons can only assist us in creating a better path to success for future generations of both teachers and students.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Excerpt, Florida Department of Education Next Generation Sunshine

State Standards

Grade 8 American History

Standard 1: Use research and inquiry skills to analyze American History using primary and secondary sources. (SS.8.A.1)

> Benchmark: 1. Provide supporting details for an answer from text, interview for oral history, check validity of information from research/text, and identify strong vs. weak arguments. (SS.8.A.1.1)

> Benchmark: 2. Analyze charts, graphs, maps, photographs and timelines; **analyze political cartoons**; determine cause and effect. (SS.8.A.1.2)

> Benchmark: 3. Analyze current events relevant to American History topics through a variety of electronic and print media resources. (SS.8.A.1.3)

> Benchmark: 4. Differentiate fact from opinion, utilize appropriate historical research and fiction/nonfiction support materials. (SS.8.A.1.4)

> Benchmark: 5. Identify, within both primary and secondary sources, the author, audience, format, and purpose of significant historical documents. (SS.8.A.1.5)

> Benchmark: 6. Compare interpretations of key events and issues throughout American History. (SS.8.A.1.6)

> Benchmark: 7. View historic events through the eyes of those who were there as shown in their art, writings, music, and artifacts. (SS.8.A.1.7)

Appendix B

Protocol - Teacher Interview #1

1. How often do you utilize political cartoons in your American History classroom? How do you choose the cartoons as well as the times and places that they are inserted into your instructional plans?

2. How much time do you spend with the students on the skills needed to interpret the techniques and devices that artists use in their cartoons?

3. What significant positives and/or negatives have presented themselves during your use of political cartoons in your American History classroom?

4. Is there any specific information that I should know about the students in this class before I present myself and my project?

Appendix C

Protocol - Teacher Interview #2*

*The questions for the second teacher interview were created based on information from previous interviews with classroom teachers, the district subject supervisor, and students in the targeted teacher's classroom.

1. Do you think teachers in your school district use political cartoons on a regular basis in their classrooms? Why or why not?

2. What resources, outside of the textbook and its associated ancillaries, do you use to locate political cartoons and other primary source documents for your classroom?

3. What specific difficulties do you find yourself dealing with most often when using political cartoons in class?

4. Which do you find easier using with your students, political cartoons from the present or cartoons from the past? Why do you think this is?

5. When using present day political cartoons, how do you handle the images that deal with potentially controversial topics?

Appendix D

Protocol - Student Interview #1

1. Tell me a little about your American History class.

2. What kinds of activities does your teacher use in class? Which of these activities do you enjoy the most/least? Why?

3. Which of these kinds of activities do you think help you the most in learning about American History? Why do you think these activities are most effective in helping you learn?

4. Have you ever seen this cartoon before (show the 'Join, or Die' cartoon)? If yes, what can you tell me about the cartoon? How often do you see/use cartoons like this one in your American History class?

5. What do you think about learning with these cartoons in your American History class? Do you think they help you better understand things in your class? Why or why not?

Appendix E

Protocol - Student Interview #2*

*The questions listed here are specifically designed to go with the image 'Forcing Slavery Down the Throat of a Freesoiler', published by John Magee in August of 1856 (see Figure 3.1).

1. Take a look at this political cartoon (show image to student using both print and digital media). Can you identify/describe all of the objects found in the cartoon? Are there any objects in the cartoon that you are unsure of?

2. Read the labels and speech bubble found at the bottom and throughout the political cartoon. What do the labels and speech bubble tell you about the cartoon? Do you think these items will ultimately make it easier to understand the image? Why or why not?

3. Refer back to the objects you identified earlier. What do you think each of these objects represents? How did you decide what each object represents?

4. This political cartoon was published in August of 1856. What were the major events going on in American history at the time the cartoon came out?

5. Review the information we have gathered so far about this political cartoon. What message or opinion do you think the artist was trying to deliver when the cartoon was created? How can you tell?

Appendix F – IRB Letter of Approval

USF
UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH FLORIDA

DIVISION OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799
(813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-5618

March 16, 2012

James Duran
10319 Westpark Preserve Blvd
Tampa, FL 33625

RE: **Expedited Approval** for Initial Review
    IRB#: Pro00006155
    Title: Political Cartoons in the American History Classroom: A
    Student's Point of View

Dear Mr. Duran:
On 3/16/2012 the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and
APPROVED the above referenced protocol. Please note that your
approval for this study will expire on 3/16/2013.

Approved Items:
Protocol Document(s):
Dissertation Proposal - James M Duran.doc
Consent/Assent Document(s):
parental consent - Duran.doc.pdf
student assent - Duran.doc.pdf

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for
expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more
than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures
listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may
review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by
45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study
is categorized under the following expedited review categories:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings
made for research purposes.
(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior
(including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition,
motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or

practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies

Please note, the informed consent/assent documents are valid during the period indicated by the official, IRB-Approval stamp located on the form. Valid consent must be documented on a copy of the most recently IRB-approved consent form.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

John A. Schinka, Ph.D.

John A. Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board