

Larry Cuban. *Teaching History Then and Now: A Story of Stability and Change in Schools*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2016. 256 pp.

For more than forty years, Larry Cuban has written about education reform and classroom practice in US schools, past and present. His scholarship focuses on themes such as the entrenchment of the grammar of schooling, the public's high expectations for education, and the lack of teacher voice in education reform. In his previous books, *How Teachers Taught: Constancy and Change in American Classrooms, 1890–1980* (1984), *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (1995), co-authored with David Tyack, and *Inside the Black Box of Classroom Practice: Change Without Reform in American Education* (2013), Cuban concluded that patterns in institutional schooling challenge most attempts at education reform.

Cuban's latest book, *Teaching History Then and Now: A Story of Stability and Change in Schools*, addresses this challenge. The central question of the book is "What has changed and what has remained the same in the content and pedagogy in high school history over the past half-century?" Cuban was motivated to understand the paradox today's history teachers face: the expectation that they promote both stability (history as heritage) and change (the pedagogy of innovative, historical thinking). Taking the role of the "historian-autobiographer," Cuban compares his experience as a high school history teacher at two schools enrolling minority and poor students in the 1950s and 1960s with his observation of history instruction at the same two schools in 2013 and 2014.

To describe his high school teaching experience, Cuban supplements his memory with contemporaneous homework assignments, photographs, grade books, and teacher diaries as well recollections by students and colleagues. Although he acknowledges the limitations of his sources—they can be selective and distorted—Cuban supports his accounts with corroborating sources that present both his successes and challenges.

In chapters one and two, Cuban describes his experience as a high school history teacher. Age twenty-one, with one year of teaching experience (in biology), Cuban was hired to teach history at Glenville High School in Cleveland. Faced with managing students only a few years his junior and with preparing five courses, Cuban relied on teacher-centered instruction and textbooks (despite having studied progressive teaching approaches at the University of Pittsburgh). However, soon dissatisfied with teacher-centered and textbook instruction, Cuban began creating his own history materials. Using primary sources, he taught his students historical thinking skills such as

corroborating, sourcing, and interpreting. In his Friday lessons, Cuban taught local, national, and international events with the aim of helping his students understand the historical antecedents of these events. He created a two-week unit centered on contemporary events in which he taught critical thinking skills (for example, distinguishing between fact and opinion and judging the reliability of sources). Cuban summarizes this approach as a hybrid of teacher-centered education and progressive education.

After seven years at Glenville, Cuban was hired as a master teacher of history in a federally funded project that inducted former Peace Corps volunteers into the teaching profession at Cardozo High School in Washington, DC. Supported by the teaching interns he mentored, in four years at Cardozo, Cuban transformed his teaching practice to include more inquiry-oriented approaches, drawing on materials provided by the New Social Studies movement. For example, he designed a primary sources unit on the assassination of John F. Kennedy in which he asked students to consider the following question: “How do we know who the assassin was?” (Forty years later, one of the former interns still teaches a modified version of the unit.) Although Cuban writes that the students’ response to the unit was positive, he regrets they failed to apply the critical thinking skills they had studied to their other history lessons.

In chapter three—the transition chapter between Cuban’s accounts of his high school teaching experiences and his description of contemporary history teaching at the two high schools—Cuban describes curricular trends and developments in history education from the mid-twentieth century to the early twenty-first century. Cuban explains the rise and fall of the New Social Studies of the 1960s, the History Wars of the 1990s, and the development of what he calls the New, New History. In particular, he praises the innovative and frequently downloaded curriculum materials that the Stanford History Education Group (SHEG) offers.

In chapters four and five, Cuban describes how history is currently taught at the two high schools where he began his career as a history teacher. He situates his findings in the broader, macro-contexts of the schools and the cities in which they are located. While he identifies some use of hybrid teaching approaches and a few examples of the New, New History in practice (especially at Cardozo), most of the teaching is content-driven and teacher-centered. However, he comments favorably on a world history teacher’s gripping lessons that use primary sources.

In chapter six, Cuban addresses stability and change in the history classroom by again comparing his own history teaching experience of years ago with his 2013 and 2014 observations. Cuban attributes the

stability in history teaching to the general resistance to change in school organization. As examples of such resistance, he offers the following: age-graded classrooms, isolation of academic subjects, and self-contained classrooms. He argues that even the adoption of materials from the New, New History will not necessarily result in a change in practice if teachers continue to use teacher-centered approaches to these materials. In concluding this chapter and the book, Cuban offers suggestions for policy-makers, practitioners, and researchers who seek improvement in how history is taught to high school students.

Readers will find little to criticize in the book. Perhaps the only criticism is that many readers would just like more—more accounts of Cuban's experience as a young teacher struggling with (and also succeeding in) teaching history in urban schools, more descriptions of contemporary history teaching, and more discussion of the book's sub-themes. For example, in chapter three, in addition to SHEG, Cuban might have included commentary about other new and innovative developments in history education. In chapter six, Cuban might have discussed the role of preservice teacher education in preparing high school history teachers. However, other sources, many of which are well documented in Cuban's endnotes, tackle those topics. According to a 2003 survey (the most recent survey Cuban located), there are fifty-seven thousand high school history teachers in the United States. What would it take to encourage more of these teachers to take a more student-centered approach (that emphasizes historical thinking) rather than the history as heritage approach? This is the central challenge Cuban presents.

However, Cuban's book is a study of much more than history education. It deals with many areas in research and discussion on US education: segregation, the professionalization of teaching, education reform, teacher induction and mentorship, leadership, the relationship between policy and practice, and, of course, the purpose of schooling. Historians of education, social studies methods instructors, and current and future history teachers will find this book engaging, informative, and at times even optimistic about the future of US education. Although his accounts of teacher-centered history teaching at the two high schools in 2013 and 2014 are somewhat discouraging, and likely representative of much history teaching throughout the country, Cuban argues that innovative, rigorous, and culturally relevant history instruction, the kind of pedagogy he developed in the 1950s, is still possible.

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