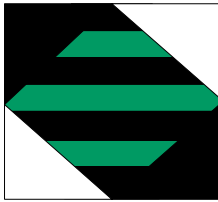


CARNEGIE ESSAYS ON THE DOCTORATE

HISTORY



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GETTING READY TO DO HISTORY

The Carnegie Foundation commissioned a collection of essays as part of the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate (CID). Essays and essayists represent six disciplines that are part of the CID: chemistry, education, English, history, mathematics and neuroscience. Intended to engender conversation about the conceptual foundation of doctoral education, the essays are a starting point and not the last word in disciplinary discussions. Those faculty members, students, and administrators who work in the discipline are the primary, among multiple, audiences for each of these essays.

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NEARLY EVERYONE STUDIES THE PAST, SO WHAT DO *HISTORIANS* DO?

Before speculating about how historians should be trained, it's not a bad idea to ask what they actually *do*. Neither question is as easy to answer as one might imagine.

The simplest response, of course, is that historians study the past. But it takes only a moment's reflection to realize that this in no way distinguishes the formal discipline called "history" from its neighbors in the academy. Most disciplines in the humanities, after all, devote much of their energy to studying the past. Literature departments study past human writing and discourse; philosophy departments study past ideas and systems of thought; art history departments study ... well, the history of art. None of the social sciences could pursue their policy interests or their concern for human cultures, social systems, or political economies without studying the histories of these things. Indeed, many subdivisions of the discipline called history are heavily parasitic on the social sciences from which they borrow questions and methodologies. Although sociologists and political scientists don't always recognize each other's work as such, they practice social and political history as much as their colleagues in history do, and there's not much question that economic history and legal history are more often written by economists and law professors than by members of history departments (though how much history, law, and economics have actually benefited from this division of labor remains an open question). As for archaeology, the only thing that would seem to separate it from history is an arbitrary boundary between history and "prehistory" on the one hand, and a rather arcane dispute over what counts as a historical document on the other.

Even the natural sciences are far more historical than we typically admit. Once one gets past the dream of timeless scientific laws that traditionally made physics the envy of its peers, it's quite striking how many of the sciences put the past at the center of their intellectual enterprise. Geology is arguably the most historical of the sciences, and despite the seeming difference between written archival sources on the one hand, and sediments and strata on the other, the underlying epistemological similarities between the ways geologists and historians go about their work are impressive. The revolution that plate tectonics represented for earth science in the twentieth century has been as profound in its impact as the revolution represented by Darwinian evolution for biology in the nineteenth – and both are nothing if not theories of historical change that now permeate every corner of their disciplines. Although astronomy may seem to the uninitiated to study mainly the vast distances of space, in fact those distances are almost always articulated in terms of time, so that the light of every star represents a different historical moment – and thus, if you will, a different historical document. Push astronomy to the outer limits of its vision, and one eventually reaches the earliest moments of creation, where even particle physics suddenly seems to become a study in historical change. Although the relevant time scales differ enormously, it is not too much of a stretch to say that virtually every academic discipline treats the past as one of its most important objects of study – not just as an interesting sidelight on more fundamental questions, but as the very heart of its intellectual project.

Finally, one of the nearest neighbors of academic history in studying and writing about the human past isn't really a discipline at all: journalism. Although historians sometimes speak pejoratively about journalistic reporting, arguing that it isn't yet remote enough from the present to have achieved dispassionate distance, or that adequate historical documents aren't

yet available for recent periods, or that reporters overemphasize biographies and personalities in their historical explanations, in fact it's pretty difficult to draw a precise boundary between journalism and history. Philip Graham of the *Washington Post* famously referred to journalism as "the rough draft of history," and certainly historians depend on journalistic sources to a remarkable degree. Moreover, the best history written by professional journalists can hold its own with the best history written by academic historians, and often has greater impact because it is written more accessibly and is usually addressed toward an audience far beyond the academy. Journalists like Allan Nevins or Robert Caro or Frances Fitzgerald or even Winston Churchill had little formal training in history, but this seems not to have diminished the influence of their books on public understanding of the past. Quite the contrary. Academic historians may be jealous of this fact, but it's difficult to argue that such works cannot properly be described as "histories." Dismissing them as "popular" seems a rather odd criticism, since more than a few academic historians would secretly love to apply that adjective to their own writings as well.

So if one of the goals of an academic discipline is to carve out a special intellectual territory to be exclusively its own and to promote its trained experts as high priests who are uniquely qualified to serve as guides (and gatekeepers) for that territory, then one might conclude from all this that academic history has been singularly unsuccessful in monopolizing its subject – the past – for itself. If everyone studies the past and everyone has useful, intelligent things to say about it, then why does one need a doctorate in history to study and hold forth on the subject? The quick answer is that one doesn't, and that good history can and has been written by many, many people who lack a history Ph.D. or any other degrees in the subject. It's worth declaring this fact right up front lest we forget that there is nothing magic about a doctorate in history. It provides real training for very real skills, and also serves as a crucial professional credential without which certain forms of employment (for instance, in the history departments of major research universities and many teaching institutions) are virtually unattainable. These are indisputable practical benefits of the degree. But many other disciplines and professional communities offer equally valuable perspectives if our goal is to understand the past in all its richness and complexity. Historians forget this truth at their peril. For this reason, a key goal in training future historians must be the constant reminder that they share their expertise with many other scholars and scientists. Learning from these colleagues in other fields is an indispensable antidote to the hubris that flows from too exclusive, inward-turned, and narrow-minded a definition of disciplinary boundaries and professional authority.

SHARED VALUES OF HISTORIANS

Having declared these caveats, though, there's still little doubt that members of the guild called "historians" do share certain normative assumptions, intellectual commitments, methodological approaches, and theoretical inclinations that separate them even from colleagues in other guilds who study the very same subjects. Put historians in a room together with representatives from other fields to discuss a topic of common concern, and they'll recognize each other pretty quickly just from the ways they ask and answer questions. A chief goal of doctoral training is presumably to inculcate new members of the guild in precisely these shared ways of asking questions, interacting with each other, and making sense of the world.

So: what values and intellectual leanings do we historians generally share? Let me list what I regard as some of the most important ones, and then consider their implications for doctoral training.

- Historians study the past mainly to discover how human beings lived back then, putting people at the center of our work. Although this may seem so obvious that it scarcely needs stating, it in fact defines the discipline of history far more than its practitioners typically realize. For one thing, it draws a stark boundary between us and most of our colleagues who study the past in the natural sciences, since for them a default focus on human beings can seem quite surprising and even counterintuitive.
- No matter what the initial question historians may ask about something in the past, our *second* question is always, “*But ... what are the documents?*” Trivial though it seems, this may be the single most crucial methodological commitment that all historians share. Few scholars who are not themselves historians appreciate just how deep this discipline-defining question goes. Historians know in their very bones that questions about the past are useless unless they point toward documents we can use to answer them. Among our greatest skills is the ability to identify new sources and squeeze new meanings from the extraordinary hodgepodge of fragmentary evidence that the past has bequeathed us. Unlike most of our colleagues in the sciences, we rarely get to query our subject directly and create new evidence by running new experiments; instead, we have to be very clever about extracting answers from documents that were usually created for purposes quite different from our own.
- For us, the past is a single vast experiment that can never be run a second time, and this has enormous implications for why our epistemologies differ so fundamentally from those of the experimental sciences.¹
- Historians are relatively uninterested in discovering broad generalizations that can be applied more or less universally without regard to time or place. This separates us from many (but not all) of our colleagues in the natural and social sciences. For us, all phenomena exist in time and are uniquely shaped by their peculiar historical moment, so must always be placed in that context.
- We are drawn to analyses in which a given event or phenomenon is explained mainly by appealing to prior causes and contexts.
- We typically construct explanations by the narrative device of periodizing, dividing the seamless continuum of past time into a sequence of discrete periods that perform roughly the same storytelling function as the chapters of a book. We periodize in this way regardless of the time scale on which we operate.
- In general, historians tend to concentrate their research within chronological and geographical boundaries that are quite constrained compared with other disciplines, often spending our entire professional careers immersing ourselves in the documents of just one time and place: “the Ancien Regime,” say, or “Antebellum America,” or

¹ It’s worth noting that we share these non-experimental, essentially narrative epistemologies with the historical sciences, which is a key reason why, though often unnoticed, we actually have more in common than we realize with historical geologists and evolutionary biologists.

“Tokugawa Japan.” Our conviction is that only by so doing will we gain a richly textured, almost intuitive understanding of the period we study. We often criticize other disciplines for failing to examine enough evidence to gain this kind of immersive holistic understanding – and for failing to produce the carefully nuanced and contextualized interpretations that go with it.

- Unlike many scientists, historians have little trouble believing that this kind of richly contextualized thick description of past events and phenomena is genuine analytical work even if it yields no obvious causal explanations. For us, the unique particularities that define a given historical moment are as interesting as any broader generalizations that might transcend that time and place. Like many other scholars in the humanities, we are as eager to understand the *meanings* of past times and lives as we are to determine their *causes*, so interpretation is as important to us as explanation.
- Although we wouldn’t typically use these words to describe what we do, we strongly prefer multicausal explanations of what we regard as overdetermined systems in the past. Tell us that a past event had only one cause, and we’ll invariably reach for our guns. We are often content (much to the frustration of our colleagues in more scientific disciplines) simply to list causal forces operating at a given moment without making much of an effort to rank them or to offer a rigorously argued assessment of their relative importance.
- Consistent with our preference for descriptive nuance, causal complexity, and immersion in sources, historians resist what we regard as overgeneralization and reductionism in other disciplines.
- As a corollary, historians generally shun the social scientific impulse to offer predictions about the future based on our professional knowledge of the past. Perhaps because the future hasn’t yet generated any documents, we don’t feel especially competent – *qua* historians – to talk about it.
- Recognizing a key danger in our own immersive approach, historians are hostile to what we sometimes pejoratively label “mere antiquarianism.” By this we mean excessive devotion to the facts and minutiae of the past without enough effort to put those facts in the service of larger questions. We believe that the way to avoid antiquarianism is to ask and answer “significant” questions about the past. We of course argue with each other all the time about what exactly this means. The major intellectual movements of the discipline – and also its shorter-lived fads – almost always hinge on struggles over what counts as “significant.”
- Historians have long believed – many decades before the intellectual movement called “postmodernism” was a gleam in anyone’s deconstructionist eye – that history is always a dialogue between past and present, so that the questions we care about in the present can’t help but shape quite profoundly what we think we know and care about in the past. We also believe that understanding past human beings requires us to try to see the world at least in part through their eyes – even though we also know we can never fully succeed in that effort.
- “Relativism” thus comes quite easily to most historians in ways that can look to outsiders very much like postmodern skepticism about the limits of factual knowledge. But historians usually couple their relativism with a basic realist epistemology

(sometimes loosely labeled “historicism”) in which the relational nature of all historical knowledge becomes our best tool for gaining real understanding of the past – rather than serving as a skeptic’s proof that the past cannot be known at all.

- Most historians long ago abandoned the conviction that history can ever be “objective” in an absolute sense. We understand not only that different people in the past had different points of view that need to be understood, but that different scholars writing in the present will likewise have different points of view that will necessarily lead them to see different things and draw different conclusions that reflect their own perspectives and assumptions. You can call this “bias” if you will, but it means that any given scholar inevitably pays more attention to certain features of the past than to others, placing that scholar in disagreement with others whose questions and passions point in different directions. Far from casting doubt on the whole enterprise, these divergent perspectives among historians actually broaden our collective understanding by perennially generating new evidence, new arguments, new insights, even new *facts*. The goal of our professional practice is thus not to eliminate “bias” – we don’t believe that’s possible or even desirable – but rather to recognize, critique, and understand its consequences. The ease with which we embrace this bias-tolerant approach can be genuinely bewildering to colleagues in other fields.
- Because we assume that all history is inevitably written from a particular point of view, we also assume that history is closely tied to present politics. Far from worrying that this will taint our scholarship (as some of our colleagues in the sciences might fear), we usually embrace the chance to explore history’s relevance to issues unfolding in our own day.
- That said, despite our belief that history is always political and never “objective,” historians quickly become suspicious of scholars who are so committed to particular ideological beliefs that they ignore or dismiss evidence that might refute or complicate those beliefs. Our disciplinary preference for complexity means that we value scholarship that acknowledges contrary perspectives in order to construct more complicated and comprehensive arguments.
- We have what amounts to an aesthetic preference for ambiguity and irony: our work usually favors pastels and shades of gray over bright primary colors. And although we may not believe in objectivity, we embrace values that nonetheless point in its general direction: tolerance, open-mindedness, fairness, and a willingness to engage and acknowledge the worth of contrary points of view.
- Although historians are like any other guild in developing special meanings for words that become heavily used or contested in our professional debates, for the most part we have maintained a deep commitment to ordinary vocabulary and accessible language. We don’t like jargon. It is no accident that academic history books find many more readers outside the academy than do those of most other disciplines.
- Finally, historians have never abandoned our commitment to narrative storytelling as an essential rhetorical and analytical tool for conveying historical knowledge. This is consistent with our preferred styles of causal explanation, our periodizing impulses, our commitment to thick description and contextualization – but it also reflects the sense many of us share that history at its very best remains a form of literature, as much an art

as a science. Historians have not forgotten that Clio was among the nine Muses of Greek mythology, and we are proud that her patronage of history sets our discipline apart from most others in the modern academy.

I'm sure my colleagues in history will dispute at least some claims on this list, and will find much to criticize in the interpretive approach that has led me to emphasize certain aspects of our professional practice at the expense of others. I would happily join them in identifying many exceptions to the broad generalizations I've just offered, and the many important features of the discipline that I've ignored altogether. Arguing with each other about such things is, after all, what we historians do. But if even a sizable fraction of the items on this list do in fact describe central tendencies of the academic discipline called "history," setting it apart from its neighbors in the academy, then the obvious next question is what these characteristics imply about the goals and practices of doctoral education for this peculiar intellectual guild.

MISTRUSTING THE PH.D. OCTOPUS

First, though, I want to reflect briefly on the benefits and costs of creating and reproducing a guild called "history" in the first place. As a historian, I'm personally and professionally committed to the values and intellectual tendencies I've just listed. I firmly believe that, on balance, they yield valuable insights about the human past that are often richer, subtler – and more pleasurable to read – than those of many other disciplines. I happily pass these values on to my students, and work hard to make sure that their commitment to history's foundational premises is as strong as my own.

At a most basic level, this is the central task of doctoral education. This is how the Ph.D. defines and reproduces a discipline.

But it is not without costs. I've already gestured at the many other approaches to the past that are embraced just as passionately by colleagues in other fields. A good many of these other approaches are in direct conflict with those of historians, emphasizing universality over particularity, hypothesis-testing over thick description, targeted data analysis over broad source immersion, theory over narrative, model-building over storytelling, technical vocabulary over the common tongue, science over literature. Suspicious though historians may be of the limitations of these alternative approaches, we should never imagine that our own preferences don't carry comparable liabilities. Every discipline has particular ways of looking at the world that offer profound insights even as they obscure other truths. Given what I've already said about the many different approaches to the past that characterize the modern academy, it would be foolish indeed to claim that any one discipline should ever have a monopoly in interpreting the human past – and this includes the discipline called history that defines the human past as its sole object of study.

A crucial function of the Ph.D. is to draw a boundary around an intellectual community, privileging the "expert knowledge" of those inside the boundary at the expense of those outside it, and also defining the social circles within which disciplinary communication takes place. This is another way of saying that the Ph.D. (like the M.D. and the J.D.) has as one of its primary goals the creation of a professional guild. Such degrees and guilds have arguably become indispensable in the modern world, and they serve many valuable purposes. But it is worth remembering that there was a time when it was possible to argue quite vehemently against their pernicious influence.

More than a century ago, William James wrote a famous attack on “The Ph.D. Octopus” in which he argued that the recently imported German Ph.D. was already having baleful effects on American colleges and universities. Although some of his ideas may now seem quaint and his language sexist, his critique is still well worth considering. The doctorate, he said, could distort the meaning of scholarship by encouraging narrow research agendas at the expense of humane learning. It could train young scholars to place greater value on technical gymnastics and inward-turned scholarly debates than on the play of ideas in broader intellectual and public realms. Worst of all, it could undermine good teaching. No mean dilettante himself, James’s greatest fear was that the Ph.D. might destroy what might be called the amateur tradition in scholarship and science: the pursuit of knowledge not for formal professional rewards, but for the sheer love of learning – a quality all great teachers share.

“To interfere with the free development of talent,” James wrote,

to obstruct the natural play of supply and demand in the teaching profession, to foster academic snobbery by the *prestige* of certain privileged institutions, to transfer accredited value from essential manhood to an outward badge, to blight hopes and promote invidious sentiments, to divert the attention of aspiring youth from direct dealings with truth to the passing of examinations, –such consequences, if they exist, ought surely to be regarded as drawbacks to the system The truth is that the Doctor-monopoly in teaching, which is becoming so rooted an American custom, can show no serious grounds whatsoever for itself in reason. ... In reality it is but a sham, a bauble, a dodge, whereby to decorate the catalogues of schools and colleges.²

A hundred years later, these criticisms may seem laughably overheated and wrong-headed. Any of us who now do doctoral training in history can come up with lots of ways to rebut James’s critique. To the extent that the values I listed in the previous section are indeed essential to good history, then the transmission of those values to the next generation of historians is presumably the chief justification for doctoral training in the first place. If the job of a discipline is to define what constitutes rigorous argument and compelling proof in a given domain of knowledge, then surely the requirement that a doctoral dissertation display disciplined arguments and proofs to make an original contribution to scholarship has yielded enormous benefits to the profession of history. What could be more basic than the doctorate’s certification that its holder has mastered core techniques and acquired qualities of mind without which good history cannot be written? Moreover, the public presentation of doctoral research – first in conference papers, then in articles, and finally in a book-length monograph – is the key process whereby professional historians declare their membership in the guild, become known to their peers, and join the circle of critical conversation that is the very heart of the discipline. Surely the doctorate at its best has done an admirable job of delivering all these professional goods.

And yet I think we should still heed James’s misgivings as we consider how to provide the best possible doctoral training for individuals seeking to become professional historians. The doctorate is a means to an end, nothing more. Leaving aside its guild-defining and gate-keeping functions, the success of doctoral training should be measured by the profundity of the scholarship it encourages, the habits of mind it cultivates, the excellence of the teaching it

²William James, “The Ph.D. Octopus,” *Harvard Monthly*, March 1903, pp. 152-153.

fosters, and the quality of public intellectual engagement it promotes. As James warned, the doctorate at its worst can fall short on every one of these measures.

By concentrating students' attention on tightly focused strands of historiography in the service of narrowly defined monographic research pursued first and foremost in the name of rigor, the Ph.D. can discourage the breadth of learning – not just about history but about life and the world – that is essential to creative scholarship, teaching, and public dialogue. To the extent that the Ph.D. encourages historians to read mainly the work of other historians – or, worse, mainly the work of historians in tiny subfields – it diminishes the discipline. Although historians employed in academic institutions spend most of their careers providing undergraduates with broad overviews of large historical topics, this is precisely the wide-ranging, synthesizing approach to the past that the doctorate too often discourages as insufficiently rigorous. Perhaps the weirdest feature of the Ph.D. – as James noticed with real bitterness – is the way it has become the gateway to teaching jobs even though most doctoral programs in history do precious little to help their students learn the teacher's craft. I'm enough inculcated with the values of the doctorate that I gladly embrace the proposition that great teaching and great scholarship can and should go together – but I cannot honestly say that typical doctoral training gives remotely equal emphasis to these equally honorable goals.

The tendency of all guilds is to turn inward upon themselves, generating specialized vocabularies and methodologies that eventually demarcate the professional community. At their best, these guild-defining tendencies can be a real source of intellectual insight, and the rites of passage that admit new members into the circle of specialized knowledge can be a legitimate source of professional authority. But they can also encourage self-referential work, in which new scholars become ever more knowledgeable about the writings of other scholars, sometimes at the expense of asking broader historical questions or considering how non-scholarly audiences (including undergraduates) might best engage those larger questions.

Self-referentiality has many perils. It can encourage the intellectual faddishness that leads scholars to trot off in pursuit of newness for newness' sake, tempting them to ignore as passé older work that in fact retains great value. It can isolate scholars by placing them in dialogue far more with each other more than with members of other disciplines or the wider public, rendering them mutually incomprehensible. The proliferation of subfields can so divide the intellectual landscape of the past that critical interconnections among highly related phenomena become completely obscured. (Nowhere is this more evident than in the marginal status of economic history in the modern academy.) Perhaps most perniciously, these self-referential tendencies can privilege some topics over others so thoroughly that enormously important questions don't even get asked, let alone researched or explored.

These dangers of professional guilds are hardly peculiar to history. But because the historical project of studying and interpreting the past is so widely shared with other disciplines, and because the potential sources of historical insight are therefore so scattered and disparate, the costs of succumbing to professional insularity are greater for historians than for other guilds. If I'm right that we pride ourselves on the openness and accessibility of our discipline, we should explicitly design our professional training to resist the negative tendencies of professionalization. This is where it can be helpful to remember James's warnings against the Ph.D. Octopus even if our goal is to design the best possible education for history Ph.D.s.

Because history will never (and should never) successfully monopolize its own discipline the way doctors and lawyers monopolize theirs, the training of historians should always be more open-ended than other guilds, more porous to outside influences, more tolerant of eclecticism. History departments are often criticized by deans and by colleagues in other disciplines for the seeming structurelessness of the history curriculum, the lack of clear progression from course to course and level to level that seems so transparently obvious for subjects like chemistry or mathematics. This apparent structurelessness no doubt reflects the vastness of our subject and its balkanization into so many periods and geographical subfields. But I also think it reflects our collective recognition that the path to good history must always involve a fair amount of wandering and serendipity. I might even go so far as to declare that history remains the great amateur discipline of the academy, in the original etymological sense applied to someone who pursues a subject more for the love of its intrinsic fascination than for money or professional prestige. If this is so, then we might echo William James by saying that the best doctoral training for historians should be training for professional amateurs.

TRAINING PROFESSIONAL GENERALISTS

If the word “amateur” has lost so much of its original meaning that we can no longer use it without implying that historians do shoddy, unprofessional work, then perhaps a less threatening description of the scholars we wish to train and certify with the history doctorate is that they should be professional generalists. For that is the ultimate goal of immersing oneself in as many sources as possible relating to a given period or problem: to gain an intricately intuitive understanding of all features of life in a past time and place, in all their interconnections and complexities and contradictions. If we aspire to this kind of holism in the histories we write, then the price we pay is that historians will rarely be as expert in any particular aspect of past life as their colleagues who study just one thing. Our conviction is that this is a price worth paying for the breadth and depth that come from holistic immersion.

So: how do we train Ph.D. students to do this? How do we encourage them to become rigorous scholars and thinkers while guarding against excessive insularity and specialization? How do we help them become equally committed as much to teaching and public engagement as to scholarly research and analysis? How do we keep them humble about the limits of their disciplinary knowledge so they remain perennially open to insights from beyond those limits? How can we encourage them never to lose the amateur spirit that William James feared the doctorate was designed to destroy? How do we train professional generalists?

One obvious and crucial answer is that we should always proceed with these questions, and the values they imply, foremost in our minds. If we accept the premise that historical knowledge grows by accretion, with ever-elaborating networks of lateral associations among bodies of information that are rarely organized in a tidy or hierarchical way, then we will be better able to resist the illusion that any particular technical reform of the doctoral curriculum can somehow supply the magic key that will reliably produce first-rate historians. If wandering and serendipity are essential to the practice of good history, then we should be careful to design curricula that provide adequate opportunities for rambling – even for occasionally getting lost – along with the pedagogical guidance to help students understand how to make this seemingly inefficient activity both creative and productive. A rigid curriculum with too many required courses is likely to achieve the opposite of its intended goals.

This is why, incidentally, the best undergraduate training for historians is a broad liberal education, exposing the future historian to a wide range of disciplines from the natural sciences through the social sciences to the humanities, with strong emphasis on basic analytical skills and as much practice as possible in analyzing, synthesizing, speaking, and writing. Although an undergraduate history major with a capstone research experience in the junior and senior years is undoubtedly valuable for students intending to go on to doctoral work in history, it is not a *sine qua non*. Excellent students have entered history doctoral programs with undergraduate majors in many different disciplines. Non-history majors may need to do catch-up work during their master's training, but if they bring with them broad general knowledge and a wide-ranging curiosity, they should be on a par with history majors by the time they are admitted to candidacy for the doctorate. Lack of specific historical knowledge can always be rectified by hard work. Nothing can cure a sustained lack of curiosity.

As for the doctorate itself, we might as well begin by declaring that the Ph.D. is likely to remain a research degree. In my view, this is as it should be. It was invented for that purpose, and seems unlikely ever to shed original scholarship as a core agenda. Its assumption is that even historians who intend to devote most of their time to interpreting and translating historical knowledge in the classroom or in public history settings will benefit from having a deep personal encounter with the process whereby such knowledge is discovered and created. For this reason, the reform of doctoral training should focus on improving rather than replacing its research component. This is likely to be achieved by broadening its intellectual agendas to include greater swaths of time and space on the one hand, and more far-reaching cross-disciplinary questions on the other. At the same time, the research emphasis of the doctorate should be substantially supplemented with training that explicitly addresses the different venues and audiences in which historical knowledge is conveyed, especially in the undergraduate classroom and in the public realm. Synthesis and communication skills deserve much more emphasis in doctoral training than they typically receive. We should strongly encourage doctoral students to ask bigger questions, to be more generally curious and knowledgeable about fields of history beyond their own monographic research specialties, and to regard effective communication and pedagogy – good writing and speaking and teaching – as indispensable professional skills.

From its beginnings at Johns Hopkins in the late nineteenth century, the research component of doctoral training in American history departments has depended on the seminar, the research paper, and the dissertation as the chief vehicles for introducing students to original scholarship using primary documents. Although there are minor variations among institutions, the typical practice is to require master's level students to produce one or more research papers – either in the form of multiple journal articles or a single master's thesis – before taking the comprehensive examinations that admit them to candidacy for the doctorate itself. A key feature of the prelim exams, and the goal toward which the earlier research papers should be directed, is the production of a prospectus that sketches the dissertation itself, complete with a well-bounded topic, well-formulated questions, a survey of primary documents containing the evidence for addressing those questions, a review of relevant secondary literature, a sketch of likely arguments, and, perhaps most important of all, a table of contents that serves the twin purposes of giving shape to the ultimate monograph and dividing the research process into manageable components.

A peculiarity of history in comparison with many other academic disciplines is its very strong emphasis on the book-length monograph as the culminating product of doctoral education. The history dissertation does triple duty: not only is it the final requirement of the doctorate itself, but it is also indispensable for getting a job in most academic institutions—and, when published as a book, it is the main basis on which tenure is awarded. This puts enormous pressure on graduate students who are all too aware that they are making a high-stakes gamble on which their entire future career may depend. But it has subtler consequences as well. Unlike the sciences, there is virtually no tradition of joint authorship in history, so that graduate mentors very rarely co-author articles or books with their students. Indeed, good graduate mentors need to make sure that their students' work is sufficiently different from their own that the mentor won't be given undue credit for the most original features of the student's scholarship. Probably because the scale of the dissertation is so large and so much depends on it, historians want no confusion about who is responsible for its authorship. For good and for ill, this has the consequence of reinforcing the extreme individualism that usually characterizes the production of historical knowledge in the academy, and gives historians very little experience with the forms of collaborative work that are such ordinary and powerful features of intellectual work in many other fields. It also reinforces the many subtle biases that point doctoral students toward the academic career paths that expect and reward this kind of individualism, as opposed to public history career paths for which collaboration is essential.

Should we move away from the book-length monograph as the default product of doctoral training? Certainly a case can be made that neither the length nor the form nor the content of the dissertation does an especially good job of serving individuals who seek mainly to work as teachers, or those who want employment in public history settings where the typical product is a museum installation, say, or a documentary film. In many cases, a well-tailored master's program specifically targeted on practicing the skills associated with such work might be a more efficient and practical means to the desired end. Furthermore, it may make eminent sense especially in public history programs to emphasize capstone projects that differ from traditional research monographs by being presented in different media or by coupling non-traditional media with analyses of the interpretive possibilities and consequences of those media. Even if historians intend mainly to work in the academy, they should all be exposed to the special challenges of communicating in non-academic settings and media, from the op-ed to the documentary film to the museum display. Given the continuing ferment in electronic communication, I'm increasingly persuaded that even academic historians should learn basic skills in using HTML and designing Web sites as part of their standard professional toolkit, since there's not much doubt that these are becoming ever more indispensable to classroom teaching and are likely to be increasingly important adjuncts of the research monograph as well.

That said, although there are good arguments for modifying the form and content of the dissertation in some circumstances, it still makes sense for doctoral training to culminate in what would once have been called a "masterpiece": work displaying mastery of a professional skill to demonstrate that its author is ready to be admitted to the guild. As the economics of publishing continue to change, and as the influence of new media, especially the Internet and the Web, continue to create new venues for the publication of scholarly research and interpretation, it is quite possible that at least some fields of history that cannot attract wide public readerships will migrate to electronic publication, if only for reasons of cost. As long as these new outlets can be "branded" to certify their rigor and excellence as happened long ago in

the print media, it seems foolish to resist them. But for those subfields that still attract significant readerships, the publication of books as a core professional activity of historians brings benefits we should explicitly recognize and train our students to understand.

Unlike professional journals, most books do not have prepackaged audiences. Each new book in effect must gather its own collection of readers. The academic disciplines that depend mainly on journals to publish their findings – which is to say, most of them – enjoy the luxury that their members can write with great rigor and technical precision for precisely the readership that can best understand what is at stake in a given argument or scientific finding. Such journal articles can be wonderfully efficient in conveying new knowledge. But this efficiency is purchased at the high price of rendering the article impenetrable and utterly uninteresting to all but its narrow technical audience. Since books must earn back the cost of their production in the open marketplace, persuading would-be readers to invest both money and time to explore their contents, they must generally be more accessible and inviting to non-technical readers. The aspect of writing, pedagogy, and rhetoric that creates a sense of intrigue in the mind of readers or listeners, encouraging them to want to learn more, is essential to writing a good book. Furthermore, the vastness and diversity of historical scholarship mean that even most historians count as “non-technical readers” for most of the writings of most of their peers. Even if we care not at all about writing for the public, we have an interest in writing books that can be understood by colleagues outside our own specialties – which includes most members of our own departments. Books help us do this. For all of these reasons, teaching students how to write really good books remains an invaluable feature of doctoral training that I would be loathe to abandon.

To prepare students to write good books, they must read books both good and bad, considering not just the ideas and arguments of those books but their rhetoric and literary qualities as well. This is why graduate training at the master’s level relies so heavily on reading seminars to expose students to a given body of historiography and orient them to possible ways they might work in the field themselves. Seminars should include readings drawn from classic works as well as the newer, cutting-edge texts with which students’ own research efforts are likely to be in dialogue. In discussing such texts with each other, students should be shown the many ways in which historians use primary documents as evidence to support an elaborating set of claims about significant historical problems. Learning to read as a professional historian means paying as much attention to footnotes and bibliographies as to the main body of the text. At the same time, the interplay of logic and rhetoric in the construction of the text proper should be fully on display in seminar discussions.

A criticism one often hears of the book-length monograph as a requirement for the history doctorate is that it takes too long to complete, and hence renders graduate education in history needlessly time-consuming and expensive. Certainly it is true that many history graduate students take longer to complete their degrees than their peers in, say, the natural sciences (though if one recognizes the large number of science Ph.D.s who spend several years on post-doctoral fellowships after completing their Ph.D.s, the differences may not be quite as large as they appear.) In some ways, the extended duration of the history Ph.D. simply reflects the way history graduate students are funded, which is primarily through teaching, with only limited support for research travel and writing. But it is also true that many history graduate students take quite a long time even to identify their major research projects, let alone complete them.

For this reason, a well-designed doctoral program should help students focus on possible dissertation topics from the moment they matriculate. The goal should *not* be for entering students to arrive with their dissertation topics already defined – that would almost surely be pernicious – but rather that they should be *seeking* those topics, and consciously gathering ideas and techniques for pursuing them, all along the way in their intellectual journey. If reading and research seminars have as their goal the discovery and pursuit of possible dissertation topics, and if the master’s thesis is directed toward the same end, possibly yielding one or more chapters of the eventual dissertation, then in many cases entire years can be shaved off time to degree for the doctorate. But this requires students to be much more intentional and directed about their programs of study, and requires faculty mentors to help them do this from the start.

In what substantive fields should future historians be trained? There can be no single answer to this question. If I’m right that eclectic wandering is essential to the historical imagination, then the best one can hope to do is to lay out a basic intellectual geography within which such wandering can occur, provide a few formal and wide-ranging opportunities to experience that geography, and then let students embark on their own unique journey. One could make an argument that all graduate students should at least audit – and ideally teach – undergraduate survey courses both in their own field and in world history as part of their basic orientation to the challenge of historical synthesis. They should unquestionably be required to take historiographical reading seminars in subjects far afield from their research specialties – the more remote in space and time, the better. Broadly defined preliminary examinations and required exposure to radically distant fields and disciplines: all of these plant the seeds for the kind of creative rambling we should promote. We cannot guarantee that a given student will finally attain the eclectic interests and broad curiosity that characterize the best historical scholarship, but we can certainly create the opportunities and model the intellectual engagements that produce such scholarship.

Perhaps the greatest goal of the reading seminar – too rarely met and often not even explicitly recognized – is to teach and practice constructive criticism. Too often, the students and faculty in graduate seminars spend much more time on criticism that is far more destructive than constructive, systematically demolishing works of scholarship without sufficiently recognizing their achievements or asking how they might genuinely be improved (as opposed to merely destroyed). Demolishing an argument is so easy that many graduate students quickly excel at it. Actually an argument is much, much harder. Yet this is precisely what graduate reading seminars most need to teach and model for their members. Few of them do a good job of it.

But reading seminars can serve another set of purposes as well, if only their teachers are willing to widen their scope. Because the goal of a reading seminar is to survey a broad domain of historical knowledge, it should ideally prepare students not just to research that field, but also to teach it and discuss it in public. If seminars focus solely on scholarly debates and the formal construction of historical arguments, they squander the opportunity to provoke conversation and train graduate students in domains of professional practice that often get much less attention than they deserve. In my own graduate seminars, I regularly devote half of my class time to what I call “professional development,” using the specific historiography under review to talk about what it’s like to work not just as a scholarly researcher, but as a teacher and writer and public intellectual as well. In one course, we ask each week what it would be like to teach undergraduates the texts we’re reading, and how one might design lectures and assignments

and discussions revolving around those readings. In another seminar, we practice writing not just professional genres like review essays – the typical products of a reading seminar – but also popular magazine articles, documentary film sequences, museum labels, even television sound bites. One can easily use documentary films, museum installations, and historical Web sites to talk as much about the presentational rhetoric of history as about scholarly research and analysis. The reading seminar can and should train students about all such matters. If the goal is to train historical professionals, then such seminars should address the full range of professional practice, not just archival research and analysis.

The other domain in which graduate students gain professional skills at the same time that they strengthen their command of large domains of historical knowledge is of course the undergraduate classroom. Too often, the work of teaching assistants is viewed by faculty members either as a means for providing financial support to graduate students, or as a way to relieve professors of the time-consuming duties associated with leading discussion sections and grading assignments. These are indispensable aspects of the labor that graduate students contribute to the academic enterprise, and I in no way minimize their importance. But from the point of view of graduate education itself, working directly with undergraduates is among the most precious opportunities that a graduate program can provide its students.

The old proverb that one never truly understands a subject until one tries to teach it is profoundly true, so that undergraduate teaching beautifully complements the reading seminar as an intellectual domain in which graduate students gain real mastery of their subject. But the craft skills they gain as teachers are no less important. Certainly this is true for any historians aspiring to work in the academy, the bulk of whose employment will focus on classroom instruction. But it is equally valuable as training for public historians, who will find college sophomores a plausible approximation for a large portion of the public audiences with whom they will eventually work. Teaching even provides excellent training for the literary skills of historians, since the ability to explain complicated ideas in clear, accessible language readily translates from the classroom to the printed page. For all these reasons, programs that “protect” their best graduate students from teaching – and fellowship programs that create perverse financial inducements to keep such students out of the classroom – do those students no favor whatsoever, and send entirely the wrong signal about what it means to be a professional historian.

The trouble, of course, is that few doctoral programs give remotely adequate emphasis to undergraduate teaching. Formal training programs are often rudimentary if they exist at all, and questions about teaching rarely surface in the regular seminar curriculum. Worse, faculty members working with teaching assistants are wildly uneven in the degree to which they commit to training and mentoring these beginning teachers. Some, astonishingly, never even meet with their TA’s except at the start of a semester. Working with teaching assistants should ideally be akin to offering a regular weekly seminar on pedagogical strategies for synthesizing and conveying a given body of historical knowledge. A properly structured graduate curriculum should include formal training for teaching assistants, discussions in reading seminars about teaching strategies, prelim fields that explicitly address pedagogical questions, strong mentoring relationships between faculty members and the teaching assistants with whom they work, and, if at all possible, the opportunity for graduate students to teach their

own lecture course as a capstone experience before entering the job market. How many professors and graduate programs actually live up to this ideal? Alas, precious few.

A CLOSING WORD ON PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS, COMMUNITIES, AND VALUES

I've chosen in this essay not to focus overmuch on formal requirements of the doctoral degree. I've made few recommendations about required courses, methods seminars, prelim fields, theses, and all the other technical features of a curriculum. It is not that such things are unimportant; they are the meat and potatoes of any doctoral program. But I have high confidence that the faculty of any good graduate department will come up with good and creative solutions to these formal challenges, and I also value the diverse intellectual approaches that naturally emerge when different faculties tackle these shared questions from different directions to yield different solutions. The immense variety of American higher education has always been among its greatest strengths. Especially given my emphasis on the rambling and serendipity that I regard as essential to the training of historians, I think we all benefit from the eclectic differences that characterize our graduate programs. To argue for a more unitary approach would be to undermine this virtue.

So I will close by returning to the core values I've defended throughout this essay, and end with a couple of very old-fashioned admonishments. Although we rarely describe it as such, I think the history doctorate retains many aspects of the ancient educational practice known as apprenticeship. Under that system, novices seeking entry into a guild or profession attach themselves to a master to learn the mysteries of a craft. Although this relationship can often go wrong – we all know horror stories about faculty members who have exploited and abused students in their care – this master-apprentice relationship remains utterly central to doctoral education at its best. Good mentoring involves teaching, advising, criticizing, coaching, cheerleading, challenging, hand-holding, questioning, advocating, nurturing, and, not least, learning and inspiring in both directions. When it works, it produces intensely personal relationships that can last a lifetime. Those of us lucky enough to have had generous and inspiring graduate mentors know how essential they were to our success. We owe a debt to them that can never be repaid, save by working as hard as we can to pass along the same kind of gifts to our own students.

If the faculty members in a doctoral program are unwilling to make the enormously demanding and time-consuming commitment to be the best possible mentors they can be, then they have no business teaching graduate students. If there is not a critical mass of committed graduate mentors in a department, then that department has no business awarding the doctorate. If a department tolerates the abuse or exploitation of graduate students in the name of a professor's "academic freedom" or by easy-going acceptance of a colleague's "foibles," then that department is betraying the very values it should be striving to defend. Mentoring should of course be a shared endeavor, so that every graduate student should ideally have several faculty members to whom she or he can turn for advice and inspiration, to say nothing of support and advocacy on the job market. But every student should also have at least one faculty member who is present for every step of the doctoral journey, a constant companion on one of the most challenging experiences of their lives. No doctoral program is worth continuing if its faculty is unable or unwilling to devote immense energy to providing this kind of mentoring, which is the hardest and most demanding teaching I know.

How does one foster a departmental culture in which such mentoring becomes possible? There is no simple answer to this difficult question, but the obvious place to start is with the word *respect*. The best doctoral programs foster a deep mutual respect among all of their members as the bedrock of their intellectual community. Graduate students respect the talents and achievements of their professors, but professors respect no less the talents and achievements and promise of their students. Indeed, faculty members recognize that at least some of their students will in all likelihood go well beyond what they themselves have accomplished, and they understand what a privilege it is to work with such people. Learning and teaching in such an environment is a two-way street. When professors and graduate students are truly working together as they should, the relationship of student to mentor is more collegial than subordinate. Hierarchy remains, of course, but as time goes on it should gradually diminish, until finally student and mentor become genuine intellectual companions, even friends. This last word is suggestive because of the other qualities it implies: committed scholars who share intellectual passions, who take pleasure in each other's company, who enjoy learned conversation for its own sake, who understand how privileged they are to have found others who revel in the life of the mind as much as they do. Any doctoral program that can reliably build a culture that transmits these values to its newest members will almost certainly produce superb historians.

But there is another feature of all first-rate doctoral programs that is equally important and often insufficiently acknowledged, which are the relationships among graduate students themselves. The friendships one forms with other students who pursue this training together are usually among the closest and most intense of one's entire professional life. The companionship they provide mirrors and in many domains goes far beyond what the faculty can offer, and is among the most precious things one acquires in earning a degree from a truly excellent doctoral program. Although they often fail to do this, departments should give great care and attention to building and sustaining strong graduate communities. Students should be helped to get to know and care about each other from the moment they arrive. Seminars should be designed to model not just competition and destructive criticism, but mutual support and constructive engagement with the intellectual projects of other students. Support groups should be the norm for all the major benchmarks: matriculation, serving as a TA, prelim exams, thesis research, and the dissertation itself. Opportunities for formal and informal gatherings both with and without the faculty should recur at frequent intervals. Students should eat and drink together often, and faculty members should join them in doing so on a regular basis. Students should be given the chance throughout their graduate careers to exercise genuine intellectual and institutional leadership, both as a source of empowerment and as a way to gain early experience in the citizenship and service that are such important features of the academic life. Especially given the excessive individualism of history as a discipline, an intentional commitment to building a lively graduate community should be an absolutely indispensable feature of every doctoral program. If a department refuses to do the hard work of building such a community, or if it lacks the resources to admit and support the critical mass of graduate students needed to sustain that community, then it should stop pretending that it has any right to award the Ph.D.

History is among the oldest and most profound of human activities. Pondering the past to make sense of ourselves and our world, passing that knowledge on from one generation to the next, striving always to understand its relevance for the present and for the future that fills both our

nightmares and our dreams: all these lie pretty near the core of our humanity. If we are to escape the tentacles of William James's Ph.D. Octopus, we must never forget how deeply all human beings share and participate in this subject that our professional guild claims as its special domain but can never monopolize or own. History is always about values and community and what it means to be human. The same must be equally true of our guild, and of the professional rites of passage we define to sustain it.

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