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Successful Strategies

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Teaching Advanced Placement United States History in the Urban, Minority High School: Successful Strategies

Robert DiLorenzo

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DEWITT CLINTON HIGH SCHOOL in the Bronx, New York, is the quintessential urban secondary school—one hundred years old with virtually one hundred percent of its 4,500 students from minority backgrounds and eligible for Federal free lunch programs. Sharp intakes of breath followed by sympathetic clucking sounds usually ensue when my suburban neighbors learn that I teach there. Only the best informed of these know of the school's storied history and once magnificent reputation. Richard Rodgers, Neil Simon, James Baldwin, Paddy Chayevsky, Richard Avedon and Ralph Lauren are only a few of a litany of famous Americans among its graduates. Most simply assume that it is just another troubled and dangerous city school; one of those which fell prey to the financial crises, "white flight," teachers' strikes, rising crime rates and immigration patterns of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

Almost none are aware of the renaissance taking place at Clinton. It is a renaissance based on rising standards and rising expectations for both students and teachers. Much of the impetus for this thrust has come from the College Board's Advanced Placement program and its effort to open its programs to those traditionally underrepresented in "college prep" and "AP" courses. Taking advantage of Mellon Grants to attend College

Board Summer Institutes, the Clinton faculty, led by Principal Norman Wechsler and the director of our school's Macy Honors Program, Phyllis McCabe, has established AP courses in United States history, European history, chemistry, biology, statistics, calculus, Spanish language, Spanish literature and English literature. Since 1991 the number of AP exams taken by Clinton students has risen from six to the nearly four hundred we will submit in May, 1998. Participation by our students and teachers in these rigorous courses permeates the school in a variety of positive ways and has lately been augmented by increased interest in higher standards and teacher training by the New York State Board of Regents and the New York City Board of Education.

Nevertheless, teaching an Advanced Placement course in such a setting entails the confrontation of challenges both daunting and different from those faced in its more traditional private or suburban school venues. The typical AP student at Clinton is not likely to have been born in the United States nor is he or she likely to speak English as a first language. He or she is likely to have come to Clinton from a failing and troubled junior high school and to be the first in the family to graduate from high school and contemplate going to college. Almost all come from neighborhoods where crime and gang activity are a constant threat and where the dominant culture places little or no value on the acquisition of a good education. What follows is an effort to describe strategies that work in a milieu of comparatively meager resources and with students less "AP ready" in some ways than those selected for such courses elsewhere.

Student Recruitment and a Summer Assignment

In late May, sophomores at DeWitt Clinton are invited to enroll in the AP United States history course based on recommendations from their English and Social Studies teachers. Formerly, teachers were simply asked to rank students in order of overall academic ability. More recently we've found it useful to ask that the rankings reflect certain qualities such as work ethic, writing skill, and ability to read and think analytically. This approach has clearly led to fewer misplacements and the retention rate in the course is above ninety percent now. The goal is, of course, to recruit as many students as possible who have a *chance* to pass the AP exam. At Clinton this has come to mean that, in AP United States history, we admit about fifty students in two sections to the course each year. Fears that we might be guilty of "gatekeeping" or excluding students who might benefit from inclusion in the course have been allayed since we decided, in 1992, to expand the course from twenty-five to fifty members. Each year about ten percent of those who begin the year in AP United States history

opt to leave, usually at the end of the Fall semester. Most do so because they aren't yet equipped, in terms of reading facility or writing ability, to meet the challenge of an AP level course. We may be wrong but we feel that there are very few juniors *not* taking the course who could truly benefit from it. The problem of "gatekeeping" is, in our view, a far more serious concern in suburban and private schools, a point made very forcefully by author Jay Matthews in his recent book *Class Struggle*.

Satisfied with exposing our best juniors to a genuine college level experience, we are less concerned with our exam results each May. Nonetheless, passing rates (sixteen percent in 1992 with twenty-four students, around thirty-three percent annually from 1993-1996 with over forty candidates each year and forty-two percent in 1997 with forty-three candidates.) and the number of fours and fives achieved have steadily increased. They are almost satisfactory to us now, at a level close to, but not quite at, the national average. Confirmation of the efficacy of this policy of broader inclusion has come from our graduates who report that they feel well prepared for the curriculum at competitive colleges. Before the introduction of AP courses graduate reaction had been just the opposite and was the major motivation for our foray into AP courses.

In most cases, even the above average student at Clinton will have written less, read less, traveled less and have less cultural and linguistic literacy than the typical AP level student. It is therefore critical to maximize the time available for writing, reading and discussion during the regular school year. One way to do this is to identify, recruit and meet with the classes in June, before school ends. At this meeting, a summer assignment is issued along with textbooks and supplementary reading material. The purpose of the assignment is threefold—to get a headstart in covering the Colonial Period, to introduce the more sophisticated materials at a time when stress and other commitments are at a minimum, and to provide the basis for beginning immediately in September with document analysis and writing activities. These assignments have varied in content over the years but this past summer's was typical:

- Reading and directed note taking from three text chapters dealing with Colonial history.
- Creation of a colonial newspaper with a prescribed number of "features" such as political cartoons, editorials, hard news articles, interviews, advertisements, etc.
- Reading two biographies, those of John Winthrop and Benjamin Franklin in *From These Beginnings* by Roderick Nash.

Whatever the content, the aim has been to design an assignment that will take from twenty-five to thirty-five hours to complete, will not dominate the

vacation, yet will provide a taste of what is to come in the fall. Handling the Colonial Era in this way, with the addition of a paper, five to seven lessons, and a Multiple Choice exam within the first two weeks of school, allows the class to begin studying the Revolution by the third week of September.

Notetaking and the Document-Based Quiz

Most New York City public school students are used to answering questions posed by their teachers or texts for homework. They are not accustomed to taking notes from their reading and even the most competent, as late as the junior year, may have difficulty producing useful notes. This is especially obvious each September in the AP United States history course when they must come to grips with relatively abstract and more densely worded readings such as those associated with their first college-level course. This inability has resulted in frustration to the point of distraction for more than a few of those in my classes. Horror stories related to note-taking problems abound at the beginning of the Fall semester. Some students honestly report taking three to four hours to take notes on a twelve-to-fifteen page text reading assignment. Inspections of notes often reveals almost as many full pages of notes as the number of pages in the assignment. For the first few years of teaching AP, my solutions to this problem centered around outlining schemes or topical (political, social, military, economic, geographical etc.) approaches. These remedies, however, proved less than adequate. What was needed was something very concrete and very straightforward. *PEDLIGS* was the answer! Now students in my classes read text chapters, monographs, biographies—any extended narrative—by taking notes only when they come across a *Person, Event, Document, Law, Idea, Group* or Supreme Court case—*PEDLIGS!* The addition of a few identifying or explanatory phrases for each entry results in comprehensive and useful notes for writing assignments, multiple choice exams and daily quizzes.

Many of our lessons begin with an eight-minute document-based quiz. Upon entering the classroom, students pick up a handout containing three or four primary source documents (speech fragments, political cartoons, letters, pictures, maps, statistics, graphs, etc.) which are selected to dovetail with the previous night's readings, but which they have not seen before. On the board is a five-item quiz composed of three rather ordinary quiz questions—Identify: The XYZ Affair; Briefly describe: The Convention of Mortefontaine; Who and under what circumstances said "Millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute?" However, in addition to the three questions the quiz will contain two questions requiring the reading and analysis of the documents in the handout. Which of the four

documents represents a High Federalist viewpoint? Which document expresses a viewpoint that President Adams would have been comfortable with? Why?—You get the idea.

Quizzes such as these certainly aren't the latest in pedagogy and might be regarded by some as pedantic. Why use them? First, students invariably rank them as the approach they consider most useful on course evaluation sheets at the end of the year. Their opinion isn't unanimous in this regard but comes close to being so, year after year. Second, they enable the teacher to keep a finger on the pulse of the class and of each student, thereby making it almost impossible for anyone to get too far behind unnoticed. Third, since students are invited to use their PEDLIGS notes during quizzes they provide incentive for good and regular note-taking. Fourth, the quizzes supply a bit of earned grade inflation for students less successful with major evaluation events such as full-length exams and papers. Fifth, they provide another means of communication, and a personal one at that, between teacher and student. Notes may be written on them praising a student for good performance in class or over a recent period. Encouragement of a bit more effort and attention might be the subject of a note on another student's returned quiz. On a typical evening five or six such comments might be written while quizzes are being graded. Finally and most importantly, the students work with documents almost everyday, increasing their facility in dealing with them and decreasing their chances of being stumped or flustered by them when handling a document-based essay question under exam conditions.

A Variety of Daily Lesson Types

There is, of course, no one "best" lesson type or method suited to an Advanced Placement history course. Conversations with colleagues over the years have revealed that most rely on either a lecture or a discussion model. Having been trained in the New York City school system to teach the traditional "developmental" lesson, which revolves around a series of "pivotal" questions, I have tended to keep my classes largely discussion-centered. For the past six years, however, because of the fortunate circumstance of my exposure to the teacher training workshops and seminars offered by the College Board (taught by such master practitioners as Eric Rothschild, Alan Fraker, Luther Spoehr and Mike Henry) things have changed quite a bit. The resulting variety in the format of daily class strategies has proven to be rather an effective antidote to boredom and disinterest—on the part of students and teacher alike. Following are some approaches that have proved useful, along with some suggestions as to the historical topics or situations in which they might be best employed.

Small Group Document “Shuffles”

This technique is used primarily in the first semester to help students acquire some comfort and facility in handling primary source documents. They do so in small groups, a setting which allows them to “lean on” one another if stumped or bewildered by a particular source. Groups of four or five students are given a set of documents (usually around a dozen), a large piece of newsprint, a glue stick and a magic marker. Each group has the same documents and the same task. They must distribute the documents equitably, determine the “message” of each document, and summarize in their own words, and then, most importantly, categorize the documents into as many sub-groups as the group can discern. Historical topics which seem naturally to fit this tactic are those in which a major historical clash has taken place—Tories vs. Patriots, Federalists vs. Jeffersonians, The Social Gospel vs. Social Darwinism, to name just a few. When finished, the group members prepare a “report” on the newsprint, labeling their categories with magic marker and gluing the documents in place under the applicable category. For this “report,” group members receive a common grade.

An interesting variation on this approach is to assign a personality or point of view to the group and ask them to categorize a set of documents from the perspective of Frederick Douglass, a Populist, a member of the “White Committee” in the 1930’s etc. Students might also be asked to provide “outside information” for some of the documents in their set, much as they are asked to do when writing an answer to a Document Based Question on the Advanced Placement Examination.

Large Group Document Lessons

For this lesson type, prepared “clusters” of documents, centered around a topic to be investigated (usually one not very deeply explored by the textbook) are given to the class in a handout. Beginning with a five-minute mini-lecture to set the scene, the class is asked to examine the documents in response to a series of questions posed by the teacher. Some questions can, of course, be prepared in advance but most, ideally, will be engendered by student responses and comments.

Sets of documents can be developed around historical episodes: the Amistad Affair, Indian Removal, the Second Great Awakening, the institution of Slavery, Seneca Falls, Child Labor, the Harlem Renaissance (with special attention paid to Clinton alumnus Countee Cullen), the Stock Market Crash, Wartime Homefronts (World War I, World War II and Vietnam) and key individuals (Dorothea Dix, Eugene V. Debs, Mark Twain, Emma Goldman, A. Phillip Randolph, Betty Friedan and Malcom X). The goal of these packages is to mimic the kind of document

sets students will encounter on the Document Based Question; to present a wide variety of primary sources for analysis—letters, pictures, maps, tables, graphs, political cartoons, speeches, laws, etc.; and to supplement the predominantly political and diplomatic narrative of our textbook, especially in the areas of social, economic, African American, intellectual and cultural history. Ideas for these particular topics sprang from the reading of “alternative” histories which tend to concentrate more on the social, economic, and “bottom rung” past. Works by authors such as Mary Beth Norton, Gary Nash, Howard Zinn and Roderick Nash have been especially fertile ground in this regard.

“Walking” Debates

Upon hearing of this technique several years ago in a College Board workshop run by Eric Rothschild and Cheryl Greenberg, I immediately determined to try it. My motivation for doing so was the lack of success that more formally organized classroom debates had yielded. “Walking” Debates work wonderfully, of course, if the topic is truly substantive and truly debatable, and one that seizes the imagination of the students. Propositions that have worked include “Japanese Relocation did not merit an apology from the United States Government,” “The change to Black Power in the 1960’s was a mistake” or “Nativism in the 1920’s was a reasonable sentiment.”

The procedure is quite simple. Students stand at the beginning of the debate and go to opposite sides of the room designated “pro” and “con,” depending upon their viewpoint. As comments are made, students are free at any time to “walk” to the other side as they are influenced or moved by the arguments and facts presented. Any student may speak after being recognized and the debate continues until movement stops.

“Milkbox Harangues”

Soap boxes are hard to come by these days but any school has sturdy plastic milk boxes in the student cafeteria that can be “liberated” for instructional purposes. Students love a break from routine and the sight of their teacher on a milk-box delivering a fiery, one-sided and even outrageous harangue on a current topic of study is pretty irresistible. Some favorites in this genre are Patrick Henry attacking a “conspiratorial” Constitutional Convention, William Lloyd Garrison charging a “Slavepower Conspiracy” before the Civil War, Mary Ellen Lease castigating Wall Street and the Banks on behalf of the Populists (the borrowed wig really enhances the impact of this one), Huey Long vilifying F.D.R.’s New Deal and Senator Joseph McCarthy’s anti-Communist ramblings.

When the class is charged with countering and correcting the misconceptions and distortions in the harangue, lively discussion usually ensues. This is especially true if the teacher maintains the untenable position throughout the period and can recruit some converts to at least a portion of his or her position.

“Tombstone” Lessons

On a visit to Monticello some years ago, the tour guide recounted the story of Jefferson’s having commissioned his own epitaph to be inscribed on his tombstone. It commemorated what he considered to have been his proudest achievements—authorship of the Declaration of Independence and the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom and the founding of the University of Virginia. These seemed to me at the time to be rather debatable choices. Why not ask classes to suggest their own three-part epitaphs for Jefferson and other historical figures? We’ve done this in different years for Hamilton, Jackson, Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon.

Especially if it is made clear that it is permissible in this case to speak ill of the departed, heated discussion may be engendered. Certainly the epitaph agreed upon for Thomas Jefferson this year bore little resemblance to his own. It was, however, an honest reflection of the sense of the class, arrived at after reading excerpts from Jefferson’s own pen and several monographs and book excerpts reflective of the most recent scholarship on both his public and private life. For example, either “hypocrite” or “racist” appeared on the “tombstones” of a majority of students. These less than flattering choices were most often the result of reading done in Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* and documents related to his management of the slave population of Monticello. Less harsh, but nonetheless equally at odds with Jefferson’s wishes was the feeling that his roles as “Republican” party leader and President were more significant than his authorship of the Virginia Statute or his founding of the University of Virginia. In these contexts they were especially impressed with his opposition to the elitist aspects of Hamiltonian Federalism, his defense of civil liberty in the Kentucky Resolutions and the Louisiana Purchase. In the end, a four-part epitaph emerged: Author of the Declaration of Independence; Republican Defender of the Common Man and Civil Liberty; Purchaser of Louisiana and Racist Master of Monticello.

Presidential “Ranking” Lessons

Collecting and distributing a series of several different attempts by historians to rank past Presidential performance provides the basis for a number of interesting lessons each year. The class can be asked if it

concur with the experts or would prefer different rankings. This works especially well if, for some reason, an aspect of a President's career looms larger for the students than it does for the professional historians. For a variety of reasons, usually related to the role and status of history's "underdogs," certain Presidential rankings seem way off the mark to my classes. Lessons related to Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, Wilson, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson have found the class at loggerheads with published rankings. From the teacher's point of view, of course, nothing could be better. In fact, last year one of the best students I've ever had, Charles Evans (he got a five on the AP Exam) was so annoyed by the ranking surveys he'd seen that he spent a good deal of time this past summer doing research and compiling his own annotated rankings. This tour de force was distributed to this year's class along with the versions from *American Heritage*, Arthur Schlesinger, Sr. *et. al.*

At first, the absence of the traditional lecture method from this repertoire of lessons was a cause for some concern. Were our students truly getting a college-level experience from these mostly "discussion driven" approaches? Six years later, this mode of delivery seems eminently suited to our school setting and our students' needs. It produces for teacher and student alike the confidence that material is being both covered and grasped on a day-to-day basis. This regime, when combined with rigorous and extended reading and writing assignments, constitutes in my view a worthwhile and reasonable transition from the high school to the college experience.

Evaluation and Testing

Fortunately, the College Board's Advanced Placement Examinations are tests actually worth "teaching to." Their centerpiece, the Document Based Essay Question (DBQ) supplies a built-in motivation for students to spend more time in the analysis of primary sources than in reading a review book.

Frequent writing assignments, based on interpretation of sets of documents, are wonderful preparation for the May examination, in addition to being intrinsically valuable learning experiences. Students may be asked to write at home in response to former examination DBQ's (containing eight to ten documents). In these, the student must include "outside information," that is, historical data not found in the documents, in the answer. Much larger, teacher-prepared sets of documents, containing as many as one hundred document excerpts, may also form the basis for "take home" DBQ's requiring no "outside information." A response to this latter type, of course, requires the examination of a far greater number of sources.

DBQ's should also be written in class, under time constraints. Students in the AP United States history class at Clinton write about ten of these per year. DBQ's containing four or five documents can be answered adequately in a forty-five minute period. A way to get some "value added" out of in-class essays of this type is to announce the DBQ a week in advance, along with three possible essay topics. Students then prepare for three but will write only one. This approach ensures that the class reviews constantly as the year progresses. For example, for an in-class DBQ half-way through the course, the three "possible" topics might be the Federalist Era, Jackson's Presidency and Reconstruction.

A few remarks might be in order with regard to teaching the DBQ to students who have not written a great deal. Documents for early DBQ writing assignments should be discussed and at least partially analyzed in class before students take them home and begin writing. The question itself should be paraphrased and dissected. Some of the documents should be read and discussed in terms of their relationship to one another and to the question. Group brainstorming of a PEDLIGS appropriate to the time period and topic of the question might also be undertaken. Prompt feedback, in the form of returned papers with grades and comments, is very important, especially early in the year. Opportunities for students to rewrite essays with low grades are a helpful teaching tool—especially, again, early in the first semester.

With regard to the multiple choice section of the May examination, a useful strategy is to use "AP level" five-item questions on tests every four or five chapters. Test items such as these are available from the College Board, which has published about three hundred of its former short-answer questions. Teacher-prepared items may also be used. Care should be taken to approximate as closely as possible the test item-to-time period ratio used on the actual exam. Currently this is eighty items in fifty-five minutes. Requiring the class to complete fifty items in thirty-eight minutes works well for most high school time schedules.

Just one more note on testing: I've found it worthwhile to allow students to bring as much information as they can cram onto a regular piece of loose-leaf, to use in both Multiple Choice and in-class essay examinations. In the second semester, a weaning process takes place and the use of these "cram" sheets is limited to the first five minutes of an essay examination and the last five minutes of a multiple choice examination. Preparation of the "cram" sheets and their later use for review, in my view, far outweigh any negative effects associated with this practice. The last few evaluation events of the year and the May examination itself, of course, are taken without any reference to such aids.

Reviewing for the AP Examination in May

A good deal of effort is expended during each school year trying to reduce the level of anxiety felt by many students as May approaches. Each January we conduct a “dry run”— a teacher-devised, full-length “AP” examination in the school’s library, the site of the actual AP examination in May. The “dry run” takes place between three p.m. and seven p.m.; dinner is served after the Multiple Choice and DBQ sections have been completed and we all joke about writing the two standard essays for “dessert.” This ritual helps, but it certainly does not completely erase the foreboding which invariably grips the class right after Easter Vacation each Spring.

What seems to reduce such tension is stopping the course eight to ten days early and conducting a thorough review. The formula for this review period is simple and rather intense. Each day of class is devoted to reviewing three or four chapters from the text, the class having been assigned to re-read their related PEDLIGS, notes, quizzes, handouts and any pertinent writing assignments or multiple choice tests. Lessons during this period follow a set format—a ten-item multiple choice quiz on the assigned material and the outlining on the board of the shape and content of a DBQ or standard essay on a topic covered in that section of the textbook.

Until the last two years, the regimen described above constituted the whole of our review. Recently, however, the College Board has begun announcing in advance the fifty-year time period from which the DBQ will be drawn. We now try to take full advantage of this largesse by holding hour-long review sessions after school each day during the review period. Dividing the fifty-year period into eight or ten subtopics, we follow a procedure similar to each day’s regular review lessons—a ten-item multiple choice quiz and an essay discussed, brainstormed and outlined on the board. Since the time period for last year’s DBQ was 1875 to 1925, we focused on topics such as the Rise of Industry, Immigration, the Populist Revolt, the rise of “Jim Crow,” Progressivism, World War I and the “Roaring ’20s.” Alas, we did no single lesson on the role and status of women for that era, which was the topic of the 1997 DBQ but in treating the other topics we did touch upon “outside information” relevant to that topic. For example, the roles of Margaret Sanger, Jane Addams and several female “muckrakers,” along with a mention of the 19th Amendment, “Flappers” and the role of women in the work force, union and political activities, were all part of our general coverage. The period for this year’s question has been announced and will be 1775-1825, and we’ll parse that era into eight or ten subtopics and hope to score

a direct hit upon this year's DBQ topic. If we do, we'll be ecstatic, but if we don't, we'll be certain to have enhanced our chance of being able to include some substantive and specific detail in the essay we are asked to write.

Taking Advantage of “Special Events”

When money and resources are in short supply, opportunities for enrichment must be seized when and where they arise. Also, any chance to show that history is a living, changing and relevant discipline should be seized. Some ways that these two goals can be reached are readily and inexpensively available. Here are some suggestions regarding the creation of “special events” to enhance an AP course:

- invite a local college professor to lecture on his or her specialty after the class has studied that topic.
- tape PBS “specials” and “documentaries” and show them in optional Friday sessions. Ken Burns' Civil War series, the recent “Liberty” or any American Experience Presidential Biography are all great for this purpose. The addition of popcorn, soda and some sort of extra credit will usually ensure a good showing.
- keep an eye out for newspaper or magazine articles on topics the class has discussed. Copy these, assign them for homework and devote class time to evaluating them. The *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times* are great sources for these and so is *American Heritage*.
- our “big splurge” special event this year is a class trip to Manhattan (on the subway) to see “1776” at the Gershwin Theater. Tickets were obtained at a student discount for a Wednesday Matinee but the twenty-five dollar price was still too steep for some of us. We raised funds by selling candy in school, and at home, so that everyone was able to participate.

Professional Growth and Starting a Professional Library

I discovered far too late in my own career the importance, excitement and fun of seeking out opportunities for professional development. Fortunately, during the past six years two major avenues for doing just that have presented themselves. Teacher training workshops offered by the College Board and summer seminars and lectures offered by the Gilder-Lehrman Institute for American History have filled this void admirably.

The College Board operates a magnificent and affordable nationwide program of tutorials on teaching AP United States history. These are led by true master teachers who are unfailingly generous, versatile and friendly. Sessions of one, two or five days duration are devoted to

practical, yet scholarly methods, ideas and strategies. Attendance at one or two of these a year cannot fail to enhance the AP teacher's level of practice, repertoire of technique and interest in the subject. To assist both beginning and experienced teachers, Mellon Grants to defray tuition are available for faculty from schools with students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The Gilder-Lehrman Institute for American History in New York City is a philanthropic enterprise open to all history faculty in the metropolitan area. Dedicated to the improvement of American history instruction, it offers each summer week-long seminars run by eminent historians at six locations. Thomas Jefferson is examined at Monticello and the University of Virginia in a course led by Douglas Wilson. Abraham Lincoln is studied at Gettysburg College and Gettysburg Battlefield in a seminar directed by Gabor Borritt. David Brion Davis leads an exploration of American Slavery at Yale. Newly created seminars on George Washington and the Cold War are led respectively by Gordon Wood at Brown and John L. Gaddis at Yale. Abolitionism is treated at Amherst by David Blight. Thirty teachers from the local area attend each of these symposia after plowing through a reading list issued in the Spring. The emphasis at all six sites is on cutting-edge scholarship and the development of classroom strategies and materials associated with that scholarship. As if this were not wonderful enough, the Institute also sponsors a series of six lectures per year at the site of its enormous document collection, the Morgan Library in New York. In the past two years alone we have heard Stephen Ambrose, James McPherson, John Keegan, Donald Kagan and Gordon Wood!

Admittedly, this last is an opportunity limited to those in a specific geographical area. However, the notion of spending time each summer reading and studying and attending lectures during the school year is one that is accessible to anyone near a college or university. Since teacher training and staff development are not the forte of most budget-starved urban school systems, that teacher serves himself and his students well who accepts the challenge of seeking out such experiences for himself.

Another important facet of professional growth and development for the teacher of disadvantaged students is the acquisition of a professional library. Patronage of used bookshops, college bookstores, sale tables at chain bookstores, and library book sales as well as memberships in the History Book Club (an adjunct of the Book of the Month club), are all effective means of keeping cost down while building a library. Books are expensive and teacher salaries low, yet often there is no alternative to the teacher buying the books without help from school funds. There are some books, moreover, which deliver so much "bang for the buck" that they are

worth acquiring, even at full price. I'd like to mention five titles which I use frequently and which no AP United States history teacher in a resource-poor setting should be without.

- *Doing the DBQ* by Luther Spoehr and Alan Fraker—an erudite and engaging “walk” through twenty-two past AP examination DBQ’s. Each chapter offers suggestions for students in approaching the DBQ and tips for teachers to use them in the classroom. It is invaluable.
- *Advanced Placement American History I: The Evolving American Nation State* and *Advanced Placement American History II: Twentieth Century Challenges*. Both are available from the Center for Learning and distributed by William C. Brown Company. These contain teacher-prepared lesson plans, many revolving around “ready made” sets of documents. These two volumes constitute a valuable resource for the beginning AP teacher who has yet to develop the resources needed to prepare lessons and materials for college-level instruction.
- *Teacher’s Guide to the Advanced Placement Course in United States History* by Eric Rothschild. This College Board publication is useful not only for its transmission of a renowned practitioner’s philosophy and practice, but for its inclusion of the curricula used in AP United States history courses at six diverse schools from around the U.S.A. It contains many practical and useful suggestions in many key areas of concern—recruitment of students, classroom activities, textbook selection, and examination preparation, to mention just a few.
- *American Issues: A Document Reader* by Charles M. Dollar and Gary W. Reichard, Random House. This is, in my view, the best all-around “reader” for use in AP United States history courses. It would be a great coup for any AP teacher in a low-budget setting to get a class set of these. Dollar and Reichard offer a blend of primary and secondary selections with ample attention paid to the need to address social, cultural, gender, intellectual and race issues in our past.
- *From These Beginnings: A Biographical Approach to American History* by Roderick Nash, Harper Collins. These two volumes contain sixteen “life and times” biographies in a style reminiscent of Plutarch. A noted social historian gives his “take” on whom students should read about to understand America in a particular time period. Traditional choices like John Winthrop, Thomas Jefferson and Henry Ford are joined by individuals representing a less traditional viewpoint, such as Abigail Adams, Tecumseh, Frederick Douglass and Jane Fonda. Chapters span the entirety of United States history and can each easily be handled in a weekend reading assignment.

LaShauna Cutts, a DeWitt Clinton High School senior who had been in the AP United States history class last year as a junior approached me recently on the subway as we both traveled downtown after school. She

was obviously excited and said “Mr. D., I just got back from a visit to Wesleyan. I was in an American history class and they were talking about Reconstruction. Can you believe it, I knew all the answers to the questions the Professor was asking! I kept my mouth shut but I know I could make it there! I love that place!”

Encounters like these are what teaching an AP course in the Bronx is all about. They make worthwhile the high quotient of effort imposed by the rigor of the curriculum and examination each May. They validate the philosophical approach of our AP program which emphasizes achievement, but not at the expense of broad participation. They confirm the wisdom of an approach that creates “props” and “crutches” early to reduce anxiety, removing them gradually as confidence and skill grow. They justify all the early mornings, late nights, after-school sessions, and the weekends, school vacations and summers spent making the course work. They make the burden of completing over forty college recommendation letters each year during June and early July before the AP examinations results are known, much more easily borne. Finally, they make me realize how wrong I was six years ago for thinking that we couldn’t “do AP” at Clinton. We have done it and to echo LaShauna’s sentiment—we know we can make it there!