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# Race, Gender and Ethnicity in the United States History Survey: *Introduction*

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At the time of publication, the author was affiliated with the College Board. At the present time, he is a senior fellow with the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania.

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# Race, Gender and Ethnicity in the United States History Survey:

## *Introduction*

### **Abstract**

It is one of the great pleasures and challenges of the Advanced Placement Program that many of the central enduring dilemmas of a discipline insist upon resolution. The sort of matters that can provoke the wry smiles of seasoned colleagues across a faculty meeting require concrete resolution for the real-world operation of this large-scale liberal arts enterprise seeking to span the realms of school and college. These matters can not be for us, in that lamentable popular expression, "an academic question." Courses need to be taught, teachers supported, students challenged, work assessed. And what are these dilemmas? Our authors have set some of these on the table for us: What constitutes the survey, and what are its central goals? How do we "reconcile the tyranny of generalization with the anarchy of the particular" as Jonathan Chu so nicely puts it? How do we ensure that new research in women's history - or any other new threads of scholarship for that matter - gets integrated into college and AP high school courses, and avoids the "add women and stir" recipe approach Mary Frederickson so aptly captured? (I do note it is a cooking metaphor, but will leave it there). How do we get beyond the "basic mantra of patriarchal hegemony," as Mary argues, and destabilize the survey a bit, even perhaps transforming it by letting go of chronology some, by subverting the "tyranny of coverage," and by stopping cleaning up the dirty mess that is our wonderful human heritage, arriving someday, just maybe, beyond the "unsexed and neutered" stories, learning more richly about women and men? How do we move ethnicity and immigration beyond, as Diane Vecchio urges, their bounded period units and beyond their association with "problems"? And in all of this, how can we insure, as Uma Venkateswaran has illustrated, that the way we assess student achievement fairly reflects what we're after, and also helps us understand what in fact is happening in classrooms around the country, so that we can inform ourselves more accurately of the status of this noble craft? For the survey, and therefore for the AP United States history course, these questions get answered whether explicitly addressed or not. AP is a mirror, if you will, as faithful as our approaches allow, to the answers made by faculty on their own.

### **Comments**

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## Race, Gender and Ethnicity in the United States History Survey: *Introduction*<sup>\*</sup>

**Michael JohaneK**

***The College Board***

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IT IS ONE OF THE GREAT PLEASURES and challenges of the Advanced Placement Program that many of the central enduring dilemmas of a discipline insist upon resolution. The sort of matters that can provoke the wry smiles of seasoned colleagues across a faculty meeting require concrete resolution for the real-world operation of this large-scale liberal arts enterprise seeking to span the realms of school and college. These matters can not be for us, in that lamentable popular expression, "an academic question." Courses need to be taught, teachers supported, students challenged, work assessed. And what are these dilemmas? Our authors have set some of these on the table for us: What constitutes the survey, and what are its central goals? How do we "reconcile the tyranny of generalization with the anarchy of the particular" as Jonathan Chu so nicely puts it? How do we ensure that new research in women's history—or any other new threads of scholarship for that matter—gets integrated into college and AP high school courses, and avoids the "add women and stir" recipe approach Mary Frederickson so aptly captured? (I do note it is a cooking metaphor, but will leave it there). How do we get beyond the "basic mantra of patriarchal hegemony," as Mary argues, and destabilize the survey a bit, even perhaps transforming it by letting go of chronology some, by subverting the "tyranny of coverage," and by stopping cleaning up the dirty mess that is our wonderful human heritage, arriving someday, just maybe, beyond the "unsexed and neutered" stories, learning more richly about women and men? How do we move ethnicity and immigration beyond, as Diane Vecchio urges, their bounded period units and beyond their association with "problems"? And in all of this, how can we insure, as Uma Venkateswaran has illustrated, that the way we assess student achievement fairly reflects what we're after, and also helps us understand what in fact is happening in classrooms around the country, so that we can inform ourselves more accurately of the status of this noble craft? For the survey, and therefore for the AP United States history course, these questions get answered whether explicitly addressed or not. AP is a mirror, if you will, as faithful as our approaches allow, to the answers made by faculty on their own.

The essays that follow do raise a host of further questions themselves. I do wonder what success—mutable and emerging and evolving and always under reconstruction as it may be—what would success look like, were we to "gender the survey" as Mary indicates? How do we generally "[make] facts and primary documents do more work...using an inquiry-based analysis of materials in a more intensive and thoughtful fashion," as Jonathan sketches in the case of Wong Kim Ark? How will we highlight continuing trends in immigration's history, broaden regional emphasis, and break the anonymity of eminent immigrants, as Diane urges? And if we find that part of the male/ female and ethnic group achievement differences in United States history assessments reflect the nature of the content, as Uma describes, how do we assure that the balance of content in the survey reflects what the field determines to be essential? And can we do this while also balancing the impact of differing interests and proclivities relating to gender and ethnicity? How would we know unless we establish some shape and size to this thing called the survey?

The authors also raise the question of the role of the AP course and exam vis-à-vis the college survey courses—can change move in both directions? Given the purpose of AP to reflect the college course, that may seem an odd question. But clearly defining that target course must involve some measure of disciplinary judgment; the determination is never a mechanical formula, and we depend on the judgment of peers, broadly in the field, and most particularly on the committee. Enhancing the data with which that judgment is made—supplementing the curriculum surveys and comparability studies Uma describes—and assuring close integration of such work with the discipline's ongoing conversation is the task at hand. It is where the abstract notions of school/college articulation actually hit the pavement. The AP course may never be the bleeding edge, as it would lose its intended function, since too many colleges would not recognize the course. On the other hand, it also can not await the complete conversion of all survey courses in a given direction before it reflects such a change, lest it move too slowly. The balance is a constant judgment call, and I for one, am glad to have these authors helping us make such calls!

I also wonder, informed by the work of my New York University colleague Jon Zimmerman, how to address the "add women and stir" notion Mary raises. Jon's recent book, *Whose America?*, looks at the treatment of history and moral issues in United States schooling, finding distinct historical patterns. Whereas moral issues continue to square off, often without achieving a common ground, school history has often simply accommodated by accretion, and by acceptance of a consensus mythology regarding the American story. How will issues of gender, race and ethnicity play out against such a pattern? Does women's history, for example, as courses move beyond simple addition, actually reflect in its implementation a blend of these patterns, given the close proximity of moral and gender issues in present society? Is it displaying a history of changing curriculum that only with considerable unevenness challenges the old story, as Mary notes? Is it balancing between an accommodationist approach and a challenge to a storyline integral to America's civic religion, its schooling? Would this help us understand the bravery now needed in addressing race, gender and ethnicity in the United States history survey?

Which brings me to Belva Lockwood, the subject of a forthcoming biography by City University of New York historian Jil Norgren, of which I've only seen an article and do not pretend any expertise. What strikes me is the question such a particular instance raises for what our panel has laid out. Here you have a 19th century rural schoolteacher who becomes the school head, then a lawyer and the first woman admitted to the bar of the United States Supreme Court as well as the first woman to argue a case there, who is also the first woman to run a full campaign for President of the United States, in 1884 no less, and who died just three years before ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. She may likely get added to texts, and watch for the special on the History Channel telling a colorful story of a heroine of women's rights. She once told Grover Cleveland, when he passed her over for an alleged womanizer to be minister to Turkey, that the only danger was "that he will attempt to suppress polygamy in that country by marrying all the women himself." You can see the boxed highlight in the textbook, the feature section of the corresponding website. But to what degree will we allow such a life to complicate the story, to push our historical narrative into messiness because of this heroine who was exasperated with Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton's major-party politics. In her exasperation she drafted a broad domestic and foreign policy agenda critical of both high-tariffs and free-trade, advocated reform of family law, sought the establishment of an international "high

court of arbitration," supported temperance, and challenged the presidential vote count in two states in an election won by the narrowest of popular vote margins. If to accommodate all of this we complicate the narrative, will we enhance students' ability, as Jonathan puts it, "to see the contingent nature of historical events, find subtlety and complexity in the American experience, search more carefully and critically for truth and, ultimately,...discern better, wisdom from folly"? Or will we simply confuse our classes? Will we also then have the courage to represent more explicitly the analytical and interpretive skills by which we would fairly assess the historical discernment we prize, and thus counter the refuge of implicitness the public often perceives as a dodge, especially in an epoch of heightened accountability rhetoric? Do we have the will to counter the perceived marriage of fact-telling and academic rigor?

And finally, will we use the survey, the seed corn of the profession—even if gendered and refracted by the rich prisms of race and ethnicity—to challenge our students to a deeper historical engagement at a time when our larger identity seems just a bit more tenuously at play? Dare we pull back that curtain just now, on the larger identity issues lurking in the shadows, anxiously in the wings, just as the spotlight searches frantically across the stage? 6

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