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THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION (ISSN 0021-6460) publishes articles concerned with a variety of topics pertinent to SDA education. Opinions expressed by our writers do not necessarily represent the views of the editors or the official position of the Department of Education of the General Conference.

Issued bimonthly, October through May, and a summer issue for June, July, August, and September by the Department of Education, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 6840 Eastern Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20012. (202) 722-6407 or 6412. Subscription price, \$11.95. Single copy, \$2.50. Price may vary where national currencies are different. Printed by University Printers, 537 Grove St., Berrien Springs, MI 49103, to whom all communications concerning change of address should be sent, giving both old and new address. *When writing about your subscription, please enclose the address label from the wrapper in which you received the journal.* Address all editorial and advertising communications to the Editor. Copyright © 1988 by University Printers.

History Is NOT Bunk

"History is bunk," Henry Ford is supposed to have said rather spitefully more than 50 years ago. Unfortunately, many of today's students would probably cheer, "Right on, Henry!" Yet those of us who love history, geography, political science, and allied disciplines know Ford was terribly wrong. He might have been a mechanical genius, but his human-relations skills were woefully deficient. It just might be that his scorn for history provides insight into his failure to understand, appreciate, and get along with people.

Why has history frequently gotten such bad press among students at all levels? Could it be that those who teach it are at least partly to blame? Students frequently ask me, "Do you expect us to memorize a lot of dates? Will we need to be able to produce lists of causes and effects for World War I, World War II, the Cold War?" Surely dates, causes and effects are all important—and are easy to use in testing a student's recall. But history is more—so much more.

One needs only to look at the Bible, loaded with historical narrative, to conclude that the Holy Spirit sees value in history. How poor would be our understanding of God, His dealings with His children, and His high hopes for their dealings with one another if we did not have the accounts of Abraham, Moses, Ruth, David, Esther, Jesus, Paul, and a host of others. Where better can we learn the lessons of trust in God, integrity, and the values of forgiving our enemies than in the story of Joseph?

History, both secular and religious, provides many opportunities to learn from the experiences of others. How better may we understand true bravery and commitment than to see Luther standing alone at Worms? Where can you get finer illustrations of overconfidence, presumption, and vanity than to see Napoleon in Moscow? We may learn lessons of persistence from Thomas Edison and George Washington Carver, the dangers of pride from Gregory VII, of vindictiveness from the makers of the Treaty of Versailles, and of a rash tongue from Henry II of England. Why not help students see the truth of Bismarck's observation that "Fools say they learn by experience. I prefer to profit by other people's experience."

History is replete with examples of the complexity of life. Few problems have simple answers—something we all need to remember. History provides endless illustrations of how people learn to handle unfamiliar circumstances—Marco Polo in Old Cathay, Frederick Douglass moving from life as a slave to one of freedom. As we see how such people found resources within themselves to cope with change, we become aware that God will energize similar resources within ourselves—if we ask Him.

True, we cannot always see the hand of God as clearly as we would like. Where was God when Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes, or Huss went to the stake at Constance? Why did a spiritual giant like Luther lose his temper and use intemperate language? Why did Calvin burn someone like Servetus simply because he held a different view of God? And yet the very posing of these questions enables us to grapple with encouraging themes like God's willingness to work through flawed instruments. When we see His ability to bring good out of bad our confidence builds.

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WHY TEACH SOCIAL STUDIES?

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the physical world and the major features of the international landscape; essential facts about the major nations of the world; and our rights and obligations as American citizens."⁸

Where to Start

First Lessons, a major study of U.S.

primary education, cautions that children must first become acquainted with the culture of their own nation "before embarking on comparative studies of other histories, cultures, societies, and governments. Otherwise, they will have no basis from which to understand important similarities and differences."⁹

History teaching in the United States is unique because America is the only country "that isn't defined by a common ethnicity, a common religion, or a common language.

What defines us are our common values."¹⁰

As we decide the Who? What? When? Where? and Why? of social studies, then, we must keep in mind the interaction between values, society, and education. In a Christian school this interrelationship has special significance. Social studies offers numerous opportunities for discussing the relationship between cause and effect in historical events, the leading of God in history, the importance of understanding different cultures in ful-

EXAMPLES OF INFLUENCES OF VALUES ON HISTORICAL EVENTS DURING 1600s

| VALUE | PERSONS | TIME | ACTIONS | EFFECT |
|--|-----------------|--------------------------|---|---|
| 1. Believed in unity of church and state | Puritans | 1st half of 17th century | Intolerance | People were actually banished: Roger Williams—1635 Anne Hutchinson—1638 Baptists & Quakers—1650s |
| 2. Covenant or federal theology belief | Puritans | 1600s | Taught state is responsible to agreements with people | Produced American idea of constitutional government |
| 3. Believed in religious freedom | Minority groups | 1600s | Relocated | America became colonized |
| 4. Lack of respect for others | Slave owners | 1619 | Slaves forced to work | Loss of human dignity |
| 5. Desire for wealth | England | 2nd half of 17th century | Acts of Trade and Navigation | Colonists smuggled goods or ignored the laws |

EDITORIAL *Continued from page 3*

Few of us realize how much we are prisoners of our own culture, yet most of us will at some time meet people with different value systems and customs that seem odd. History and its allied disciplines, geography and sociology, provide insights into why the values of Europeans, Africans, or Americans differ from those of Latin Americans, Asians, or Russians.

As our students dutifully learn about "cause and effect" we can help them see the broader application of the principle of "sowing and reaping." All our choices have consequences. This is true of churches and nations as well as individuals. When Elizabeth I decided against marriage to Philip II, she knew that he might retaliate by hurling the military power of Spain against England. And she prepared for that possibility.

Today's parents (and many students) are not happy with a value-free education. Where better can young people build a Christian value system than in social studies classes? In these classes teachers can play a part in shaping today's youth for useful service to their community and citizenship in Christ's eternal kingdom.—Richard W. Schwarz. □

Dr. Richard Schwarz is Professor of History at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, and Past President of the Association of Seventh-day Adventist Historians. He authored a college denominational history textbook entitled Light Bearers to the Remnant (Pacific Press, 1979).

filling the gospel commission, and biblical principles for harmonious relations between peoples and nations.

Cause and Effect

Social studies should help young people understand that the values people view as important influence their decisions. This can help students comprehend the ways that their own lives will be influenced by their values and decision-making.

At every level, social studies should emphasize the trends and forces that helped shape society. In studying the Colonial period of American history, students should learn about the underlying values that caused people to seek freedom to govern themselves, to worship as they wished, and to fight a war to establish their liberty.

The same questions about values should be applied to other periods in American history. What values did Americans in Andrew Jackson's