EDUCATING NOMADS: NARRATIVES AND THE FUTURE OF CIVIC EDUCATION

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Thousands of years ago man, the nomadic food-gatherer, had taken up positional, or relatively sedentary, tasks. He began to specialize. The development of writing and printing were major stages of that process. They were supremely specialist in separating the roles of knowledge from the roles of action, even though at times it could appear that "the pen is mightier than the sword." But with electricity and automation, the technology of fragmented processes suddenly fused with the human dialogue and the need for over-all consideration of human unity. **Men are suddenly nomadic gatherers of knowledge, nomadic as never before, informed as never before, free from fragmentary specialism as never before -- but also involved in the total social process as never before; since with electricity we extend our central nervous system globally, instantly interrelating every human experience.**

Marshall McLuhan

Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (1964)

Page 358; emphasis added

Teachers... who were trained before the advent of computers cannot fully comprehend the revolution through which we are passing because they view it through the eyes of a past era. The true integration of computing into education... will only occur when people who are now growing up with the technology become the teachers… of the future. Nevertheless, we, the members of the transitional generation who learned how to use computers as adults, can make the transition from the industrial age to the computer age easier by realizing we must come to grips with a new phenomenon for which we were never trained.

Robert K. Logan

The Fifth Language: Learning a Living in the Computer Age

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In recent years, the concern for civic education has re-entered the mainstream agenda of American political science. The reasons for this are many and far from irrelevant to the current spate of projects and debates centered on the profession's responsibility in this area. Besides the rhetoric devoted to justifying a profession-wide effort to deal with civic education, most of our collective attention has been spent considering the various means for meeting the challenges of educating citizens. For those who have been dealing with this issue for decades, the renewed interest among their colleagues must be both heart warming and annoying. On the one hand, the many years they have spent on the periphery of the profession are now being rewarded with a re-discovery and greater appreciation of their decades of hard work. On the other hand, the tendency of relative "newcomers" to regard their contributions as revelations must generate some ill feelings among those who have long stayed the course.

In this paper, I reluctantly risk the animosity of those colleagues by posing an argument about the nature of the civic education challenge. I will argue that the primary issue facing the profession in the area of educating citizens is much "deeper" than those currently being discussed. As reflected in the title of the American Political Science Association committee organized to deal with civic education matters (the Task Force on Civic Education in the 21st Century), the focus is on the challenges of the future rather than reviewing the problems of the past. We need to take that orientation seriously and consider what needs to be done to "reach" the next generation of students.

Most efforts in this regard have operated under the assumption that students of the future will be like students of the past. Based on this view, the problem is most often regarded as a matter of selecting an effective way to disseminate relevant knowledge.[1] In this paper I argue for operating on a different set of assumptions, i.e. that we need to take seriously the emergence of the new worldview among students growing up in the age of the personal computer and other new technologies. Put briefly, how do we prepare ourselves for educating what Marshall McLuhan called the "nomadic gatherers of knowledge" who are the citizens of tomorrow.

To meet this challenge, I will argue, we must rethink the very nature of what civic education entails. Rather than viewing it as the training and "informing" of more rational voters and community activists, we need to think of civic education as the cultivation of a

[1] For a superb summary of this view and the solutions it has generated, see Dynneson and Gross 1991

relevant "narrative" that will engage students in American civic life. After presenting a brief and speculative characterization of the "nomadic student," I offer a brief overview of the role played by different civic education narratives over the past two centuries. Finally, I will consider how we might approach developing a civic education narrative of the future, and what the implications of the narrative shift might be for those of us who will be engaged in "educating nomads."

Electronic Nomads

Times change, and so do students. That all too obvious fact has significant implications for the civic education movement now taking hold among political scientists. Much depends on the degree of change that is occurring or has occurred. If the change is minimal -- that is, if the student of tomorrow is little different from the student of today or even of recent decades -- then we can assume any insights we have into the problems of civic education today will be relevant to creating tomorrow's curriculum. But if, in fact, the student of tomorrow is quite different from today's, then the challenge is more significant. That being the case, we would be engaging in a much more ambitious endeavor -- one calling for fresh thinking about what it means to educate citizens.

"What if...": Among those who study the current trends in American culture, there is considerable agreement that something is happening of a transformational nature. That we have entered into a new cultural state is not itself a new observation. There are a number of popular authors over the past four decades who have discussed these changes in great detail. From Daniel Bell's post-industrialism and Alvin Toffler's future shock to the many pundits of postmodernism, we have been overwhelmed with essays and analyses about our radically changing culture. Prominent among these observers during the 1960s was Marshall McLuhan. His works of scholarship and commentary -- often bordering on performance art -- were frequently as insightful as they were controversial. It is his observations about the impact of changing media on social lives that seems most relevant to the issues facing civic education.

With fellow Canadian Harold Innis, McLuhan establish the influential Toronto school of communications theory and popularized the view that media was more than a passive conduit for information. Behind all the famous "one liners" that became McLuhan's signature characteristic (e.g., the medium is the message, the global village, hot media and cool media), was a perspective featuring media changes as central to the

transformation of cultures and social relationships.[2] It was in the context of that theory that McLuhan made predictions about the future of work and education. At the conclusion of his most cited work, **Understanding Media**, McLuhan predicts that the electronic age -- characterized by the high-speed transmission of information through technologies such as computers -- will spark a media-driven social revolution, not unlike (in scope and range of impact) what occurred after the introduction of the printing press.[3] He foresees the future as one where boundaries among social activities will blur and the "specialism" of the industrial age will disappear. He uses the metaphor of light to convey his view of the future: "The electronic age is literally one of illumination. Just as light is at once energy and information, so electric automation unites production, consumption, and learning in an inextricable process."[4] In such an age, people will "learn a living" rather than just work. In addition, the very nature of learning itself will become transformed as students -- and for McLuhan, everyone will be the student -- develop into "nomadic gatherers of knowledge."[5]

Although relying little on the work of McLuhan or Innis, Shoshana Zuboff provides an elaboration of the new information technology's impact in the workplace. Focusing on the automation of work associated with the industrial revolution, she highlights the significant difference "informating" will make in the workplace.

> The progress of automation has been associated with both a general decline in the degree of know-how required of the worker and a decline in the degree of physical punishment to which he or she must be subjected. Information technology, however, does have the potential to redirect the historical trajectory of automation. The intrinsic power of its informating capacity can change the basis upon which knowledge is developed and applied in the industrial production process by lifting knowledge entirely out of the body's domain. The new technology signals the transposition of work activities to the abstract domain of information. Toil no longer implies physical depletion. "Work" becomes the manipulation of symbols, and when this occurs, the nature of skill is redefined. The application of technology that preserves the body may no longer imply the destruction of knowledge; instead, it may imply the reconstruction of knowledge of a different sort.[6]

Zuboff's analysis leads her to conclude that the informating of work and the workplace will eventually challenge the current structures of hierarchical authority found in industrial organizations. "The informating process may not be sufficient to transform authority, but

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[2] For an overview of the Innis/McLuhan theory, see Logan 1995, especially chapter 2

[3] McLuhan 1965, chapter 33

[4] McLuhan 1965, p. 350

[5] McLuhan 1965, p. 358

[6] Zuboff 1988, p. 23

it does appear to erode the pragmatic claims that have lent force and credibility to the traditional managerial role."[7]

That transformation of the worker and workplace is indicative of a similar change occurring to the student and classroom of the "informated" future. This is the major argument made by Robert K. Logan in his **The Fifth Language**. Relying on the contention that language is a major determinant of how individuals and societies view the world -- and thus, how they learn -- Logan argues that computing is more than a technical phenomenon; it is in fact a new language through which we communicate. Giving it the same status has speech, writing, mathematics and science, Logan sees the language of computing at the center of a subtle but significant psychological transformation.

> The history of ideas has the appearance of a linear evolution of technical change. Periods of technological stasis are punctuated by moments of violent technological change and breakthroughs. This gives rise to a picture of the "great moments" in the history of technology in which "great individuals" charged with genius make Earth-shattering breakthroughs. These innovations are slowly digested by the rest of society until the next genius comes along to once again "shake things up" and start a new process of change.
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> In fact, between explosions of creative energy, a ferment of activity takes place, quietly at the cognitive level of individuals and within the dynamics of the socioeconomic interactions of society. Change is at work not only within these two spheres but also at the interface, where a subtle tension between the two arises, from which change flows.[8]

Education is a major stage upon which those changes take place, [9] and Logan provides a detailed analysis highlighting nine "significant impacts" computing -- in the form of the microcomputer -- is having in schools as well as in the workplace:

1. The microcomputer is the first medium to successfully vie with television for the attention of both adults and young people since the advent of commercial television.

2. The microcomputer is a medium of communication which is interactive and hence has the potential to promote exploration and discovery.

3. The microcomputer is a medium which promotes educational activity and hence can liberate untapped potential in students and workers.

4. The microcomputer is an ideal medium for delivering and promoting individual life learning and/or individualized work productivity.

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[7] Zuboff 1988, p. 309

[8] Logan 1995, p. 128

[9] Logan 1995, chapter 4

5. The microcomputer has the potential to promote a positive attitude towards work and learning and encourage a positive self concept.

6. The microcomputer has the potential to profoundly change teaching patterns within the classroom, as well as the social interactions of pupils and teachers in schools and of staff and management in the workplace.

7. The microcomputer is the first educational technology to be introduced into schools at the grass-roots level by teachers, parents, and students, and into the workplace by workers and middle managers rather than senior administrators.

8. The microcomputer is a medium through which the curriculum can be integrated in the school and the flow of work can be integrated in the business world.

9. The microcomputer will act as an agent of reform challenging the notion that hierarchical control-and-command structures are the most effective way to conduct business or that a formal school structure is the best setting for educating students.[10]

But this analysis falls short of the vision offered by McLuhan and Innis. Logan, like many others who have addressed the role of computers and the new technology in education, implies more than he is willing to assert explicitly. Having noted that computing technology will have a fundamental impact on individual cognition, Logan seems to retreat from the full implications of that observation. To understand why, we need to consider the radical challenge the McLuhanistic vision poses for contemporary education theory.

Piaget's legacy: If there is a mainstream or dominant theory in education today, it is one rooted in the work of Jean Piaget. The Swiss psychologist drew attention to the importance of understanding the role of reasoning in assessing a child's developing intelligence. How a child reasons depends on his or her stage of development. A baby reasons through sensory perceptions, eventually developing an awareness of the object world surrounding him or her. Reaching the ages of 4 to 6, the child develops a capacity to manipulate objects through mental operations -- i.e. symbolic systems. Next comes the development of mental capacities associated with reasoning about the relationships of objects in time and space. Finally, in early adolescence comes the ability of children to logically reason.[11]

The popularity of Piaget's developmental model has many sources. First, as Howard Gardner points out, Piaget "has taken children seriously".[12] Second, his work

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[10] Logan 1995, pp. 187-188, 189-203

[11] See Gardner 1983, pp. 18-19

[12] Gardner 1983, p. 20

was based on empirical research, primarily in the form of experimentation. Third, his model explained how children mature into logical, rational beings.

It is that last point that has carried so much weight in the educational community, for it fits well with the idealized picture of an educated person. That is, one who is logical and reasonable, capable of dealing with problems and issues in a relatively rational way. (We will return to this "ideal" in our discussion of the modern civic education narrative below.) The forms of reasoning prior to the last stage in the development process are regarded as merely transitional steps on the way toward the final, and more desirable, outcome. In short, implied in the Piaget perspective was an educational agenda that promoted the movement toward formalized reasoning.[13]

Logan explicitly adopts the premises of the Piaget model. He accepts the developmental framework, holding that "the order of the stages of development is a constant and a child cannot pass through any of the later stages until the earlier stages have been completed." The process of educating children is "gradual and continuous and there are no sudden discontinuities in the child's development."

> Children learn by acting on the world and transforming it and thereby coming to partial understandings which are continually revised, broadened, restructured, and related to each other.
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> Piaget's work reinforces the notion that science cannot be taught by grafting scientific facts into a child's head, nor can it work by merely teaching children the concept of the scientific method…. Children must come to learn the structure of scientific thinking by processing information themselves. Unless they experience the processing of the data within their own psyche, there can be no cognitive development to the formal operational stage, which is the prerequisite for true scientific thinking and disciplined inquiry. Obtaining the "right answer" is absolutely useless unless the children participate in the process of discovering it for themselves.[14]

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[13] Of course, there are disagreements about how the Piaget model should be implemented in the school curriculum. Jerome Bruner, for example, argues for the intellectual value and necessity of the lessons children learn at the earlier stages.

> "There are stages of development that constrain how fast and how far the child can leap ahead into abstraction. Piaget's views are always to be taken seriously in this regard, but they too must be regarded with caution. The child's mind does not move to higher levels of abstraction like the tide coming in. Development depends also... upon the child's practical grasp of the context or situation in which he or she has to reason. A good intuitive, practical grasp of a domain at one stage of development leads to better, earlier, and deeper thinking in the next stage when the child meets challenging new problems in that domain. As a teacher, you do not wait for readiness to happen; you foster or "scaffold" it by deepening the child powers at the stage where you find him or her now." Bruner 1996 p.120

[14] Logan 1995, p. 311

For Logan, the new information technology is a tool rather than a transformational factor. It will not change the student, but only facilitate his or her development as an educated individual in the Piagetian sense.

But what if that is not the case? What if McLuhan was right, and one major consequence of the new technology was to nurture a generation of students whose approach to reasoning does not follow the path toward logical reasoning? What if the electronic age created "nomadic gatherers of knowledge" rather than scientific-method rationalists?

The evidence... such as it is: Before proceeding any further, I want to clarify just who we are talking about in this analysis of civic education. There are two major groups whose reactions to the new technology have drawn attention from scholars and other commentators. A great deal of attention has been given to those "baby boomers," "GenerationXers," and "twentysomethings" who have come to the "net" relatively late in life -- that is, they spent most of their childhood and adolescence in front of the television rather than the computer screen. Their behavior and reactions have been the subject of studies published under such labels as "the saturated self"[15] and "escape velocity."[16] The saturated self discussed by Kenneth J. Gergen is a typical middle-class American who has lived through an era of significant change, only to find himself or herself overwhelmed not only by information but also the proliferation of relationships that has accompanied the spread of the new technologies.

> For much of the world's population, especially the industrialized West, the small, face-to-face community is vanishing into the pages of history. We go to country inns for weekend outings, we decorate condominium interiors with clapboards and brass beds, and we dream of old age in a rural cottage. But as the results of the technological developments just described, contemporary life is a swirling sea of social relations. Words thunder in by radio, television, newspaper, mail, radio, telephone, fax, wire service, electronic mail, billboards, Federal Express, and more. Waves of new faces are everywhere -- in town for day, visiting for the weekend, at the Rotary lunch, at the church social -- and incessantly and incandescently on television. Long weeks in a single community are unusual; a full day within a single neighborhood is becoming rare. We travel casually across town, into the countryside, to neighboring towns, cities, states; one might go 30 miles for coffee and conversation.
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> Through the technologies of the century, the number and variety of relationships in which we are engaged, potential frequency of contact, expressed intensity of relationship, and

[15] Gergen 1991

[16] Dery 1996

> endurance through time all are steadily increasing. As this increase becomes extreme we reach the state of social saturation....[17]

In **Escape Velocity**, Mark Dery focuses on cyberspace subcultures that have directly engaged the new technologies and use them as forms of artistic expression and vehicles for unconventional behavior. All "are engaged in the inherently political activity of expropriating technology from the scientists and CEOs, policymakers and opinion-shapers who have traditionally determined the applications, availability, and evolution of the devices that, more and more, shape our lives."[18]

For our purposes, however, the focus is on what Don Tapscott has termed the "Net Generation." Writing in 1997, he brackets the age group between infancy and those just reaching twenty. What makes them different? "It is the first [generation] to grow up surrounded by digital media."

> Computers can be found in the home, school, factory, and office and digital technologies such as cameras, video games, and CD-ROMs are commonplace. Increasingly, these new media are connected by the Internet, an expanding web of networks which is attracting a million new users monthly. Today's kids are so bathed in bits that they think it's all part of the natural landscape. To them, the digital technology is no more intimidating than a VCR or toaster.[19]

Perhaps more than any other writer, Tapscott regards these "N-Geners" as a significant challenge to our assumptions about child development and how youngsters learn.

> The Net Generation children... are beginning to process information and learn differently than the boomers before them. New media tools offer great promise for a new model of learning -- one based on discovery and participation. This combination of a new generation and new digital tools will cause a rethinking of the nature of education -- in both content and delivery. As the N-Gen enters the workforce, it will also place profound demands on its employers to create new environments for lifelong learning.[20]

Using a worldwide panel of 300 N-Geners interviewed over the web, Tapscott develops a list of ten themes characteristic of their "culture": a "fierce independence"; emotional and intellectual openness; a commitment to greater "social inclusion"; greater exposure to a diversity of ideas and commitment to free expression; innovativeness; a preoccupation with being taken seriously by adults; a willingness -- a desire -- to "look

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[17] Gergen 1991, p. 61

[18] Dery 1996, pp. 14-15

[19] Tapscott 1998, p. 1

[20] Tapscott 1998, p. 127

under the hood" and investigate; a bias toward immediate response and gratification; greater sensitivity to "corporate interests"; and the linking of trust to proven authenticity.[21]

His contact with these children also led him to observations about their personalities and "mind." As personalities he found them accepting of diversity, curious and willing to explore, and very assertive and self-reliant.[22] Other terms Tapscott uses in his observations characterize the N-Geners as "contrarian," high in self-esteem, intelligent, comfortable with assuming multiple identities, and undaunted by the collapse of spatial distances.[23]

As important is Tapscott's assessment of the negative characterizations of N-Geners by critics such as Neil Postman,[24] Clifford Stoll,[25] and Theodore Roszak,[26] among others. He offers arguments to show that they are indeed developing useful social skills early in life; are capable of giving intense attention to relevant tasks and information; tend to be much less cruel and less vain than the critics give them credit for; and are neither as "stressed out" nor addicted to the net as often charged.[27]

Of course, Tapscott's panel members and their comments probably do not represent the typical N-Gener. Furthermore, his observations are those of a popular writer who is trying to prove his point. We do have some scattered empirical evidence regarding this group, but most of what we know about them remains case-based and anecdotal.

One study by Australians Russell and Holmes focused on trends in student home use of information technology and (not surprisingly) indicates a rapid growth in the use of different new technologies across the board. Analyzing data gathered initially in 1990 and again in 1994-1995, the authors conclude that the various forms of communication and information technology -- from televisions to fax machines, from radios to the Internet, from CD players to walkmans -- "are not merely informational tools but environmental conditions making possible electronic lifestyles." In contrast to Nicholas

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[21] Tapscott 1998, pp. 66-77

[22] Tapscott 1998, pp. 87-88

[23] Tapscott 1998, chapter 5

[24] Postman 1995

[25] Stoll 1995; Stoll 1997

[26] Roszak 1994

[27] Tapscott 1998, chapter 6

Negroponte's forecast of the convergence of media in the computer,[28] they were seeing a convergence "at the level of cultural practice. To this degree the rapid move toward technological convergence merely makes more material what is already being put together at a cultural level."

The Australian students and their generational peers are constructing individual "lifestyles" taking advantage of technological competencies that previous generations have hardly dreamed about. "The resulting lifestyles, characteristically, are likely to show higher levels of nomadic behavior in their use of [new technologies]..."[29] That "nomadism" is characterized by technologies that provide "high levels of personalisation, mobility and global reach." They have greater independence as learners from the institutional constraints of family and school.

> Where technologies are personalised, such as in the use of Walkmans and mobile phones, users are provided with enhanced autonomy over what they consume or who they interact with. The music or the conversation is scaled to their own bodily control and exclusive experience. Similarly, the mobility that these technologies offer means that property control that has traditionally been exercised over the use of technology by adolescents rapidly disappears. But even technologies which cannot be personalised in a mobile sense are able to supply similar kinds of autonomy because of their interactivity. Thus computer games, video games and the Internet, which entail screens of interaction rather than passive viewing, become personalised to the user. These technologies... promote the forms of self-construction in adolescents that are highly related to their technological competency with [the technologies].... Moreover, broadband interface technologies such as the Internet also enable the universal autonomy of global reach... [that is,] the ability to ' go anywhere...'[30]

There are also analyses of cases indicating something even deeper and more meaningful is occurring among these young users. Sherry Turkle, a noted sociologist/clinical psychologist based at MIT, has been interviewing new technology users across generations for several years. Among her observations is that computers are influencing contemporary culture by fostering a postmodern context within which a growing number of people can operate.

> The technologies of our everyday lives change the way we see the world. Painting and photography appropriated nature. When we look at some flowers or water lilies, we see them through the eyes and the art of van Gogh or Monet. When we marry, the ceremony and the ensuing celebration produce photographs and videotapes that displace the event and become our memories of it. Computers, too, lead us to construct things in new ways. With computers we can simulate nature in the program or leave nature aside and build second natures limited only by our powers of imagination and abstraction. The objects on the screen

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[28] Negroponte 1995

[29] Russell and Holmes 1996

[30] Russell and Holmes 1996

> have no simple physical referent. In this sense, life on the screen is without origins and foundation. It is a place where signs taken for reality may substitute for the real Its aesthetic has to do with manipulation and recombination.
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> ...
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> The notion of worlds without origins is close to the postmodern challenge to the traditional epistemologies of depth. These epistemologies are theories of knowledge where the manifest refers back to the latent, the signifier to the signified. In contrast, the postmodern is a world without depth, a world of surface. If there is no underlying meaning, or a meaning we shall never know, postmodern theorists argue that the privileged way of knowing can only be through an exploration of surfaces. This makes social knowledge into something that we might navigate much as we explore the Macintosh screen and its multiple layers of files and applications. In recent years, computers have become the postmodern era's primary objects-to-think-with, not simply part of larger cultural movements but carriers of ***new ways of knowing***.[31]

Here in Turkle's analysis we have the most elaborate statement of how the new technologies may be altering the very essence of learning. She directly challenges the relevance of Piaget's model to the mentality emerging from this new "life on the screen." Turkle adopts instead Claude Levi-Strauss' concept of " bricolage" to convey the learning approach she observes with greater frequency among today's computer users. Unlike the analytic, scientific rationality of the industrial West, bricolage thinking is more associative, playful, informal and less hierarchical. "Bricoleurs approach problem-solving by entering into a relationship with their work materials that has more than the flavor of a conversation than a monologue." They depend more on visualization and intuition than on a set of rules or logic. And while Levi-Strauss had regarded bricolage as a rather backward or primitive stage in human intelligence,[32] Turkle regards it as the emerging form in today's cyberspace environment.[33]

So what?: Could it be, as McLuhan predicted, that the age of new technologies is transforming the way our children think? Despite the admittedly weak evidence at hand, there is clearly something happening in the world of N-Geners. And if we are witnessing the emergence of bricolage thinking as the preeminent postmodern form, what are the implications of such a change for education in general, and civic education in particular? Before speculating about answers to the last question, we need to consider that there is in a historical precedent for such watershed developments in history of American civic education.

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[31] Turkle 1995, pp. 47-48, emphasis added

[32] Lévi-Strauss 1966

[33] Turkle 1995, chapter 2

Our focus for this analysis builds on the thesis that civic education is fundamentally transmitted through narratives about the United States and what it means to be a citizen. There have, of course, always been distinctive narratives and allegories associated with the American literary scene.[34] But here our attention will be focused on narratives expressly designed to serve the needs of educating citizens and instilling patriotism and commitment among the general population, and especially among the young.

Narratives have been getting a good deal of attention from literary scholars for decades, and most trace the subject back to Aristotle. Formalized as the field of "narratology," the study of narratives has become quite elaborate. "A narrative," according to one source, "is the semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal and causal way." Saying the narrative is semiotic -- that is, made of signs -- means that we will find it in "texts" of various sorts: linguistic, pictorial, theatrical, filmic. Its characterization as representation reflects the fact that it has a point of view, a perspective, "arguably, an implicit theory of reality." What it represents are essentially "stories" -- a "series of the events" connected in a meaningful way.[35] To keep our analysis relatively simple, we will adopt Seymour Chatman's approach and highlight the two major components of any narrative: its story (or content) and its expression (or discourse).[36]

As we shall see, the concept of the narrative proves useful in three ways. First, it helps us better understand the form and function of civic education in American history. Second, it serves as a means to better comprehend the "psychology" of the nomadic N-Geners. Third and finally, it provides us with the vehicle we will need if we are going to deal with the challenges of educating nomads.

A HISTORY OF CIVIC EDUCATION NARRATIVES

Applying the concept of the narrative to the history of civic education in the United States can only be done using the broad strokes of very wide brushes. The various forms of training citizens and instilling patriotism in the general populace make it difficult to generalize about any dominant narrative content or discourse. There is also

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[34] E.g., see Dolan 1994

[35] From the "Introduction" to Onega Jaén and García Landa 1996, p. 3

the problem of defining the period when a narrative emerges, begins to dominate relative to alternative narratives, or begins to fade in influence or impact.

While contending with these problems, it is still possible to sense shifts in the intellectual milieu that indicates the salience of one narrative form over the others. The evidence in part is drawn from the writings of influential contributors to the civic education curriculum at any given time. In addition, the close relationship between educational reform movements and different civic education narratives helps us understand the time frames as well as the political forces involved.

At the risk of over simplifying a very rich and complicated history, I will highlight four major civic education narratives: the classical, preeminent from the early 1780s to about 1820; the mythic, which is important for the next half-century and beyond; the progressive, that emerged in the post Civil War era and remained important through at least the 1930s if not longer; and the modern narrative that dates from about the 1920s and 1930s, reaching its highest influence during the Cold War era.

The Classical Narrative: Civic education at the outset of U.S. history reflected an image of the citizen inherent in the "civic humanism" of the time. The concept of citizenship in the "Federalist era"[37] was rooted in ideas such as community harmony and "civic virtue" -- what John Adams termed the "positive passion for the public good."[38] It was also greatly influenced by the Puritan legacy that called for citizens to live a moral life -- one based on self-control and discipline.[39] To educate citizens meant instilling in them those characteristics associated with civic virtue. In advocating such a position, civic humanists from Noah Webster and Benjamin Franklin to John Adams and Thomas Jefferson were reacting to a more "nationalistic" approach common at the time in the British Isles and other European states.[40]

Although we often pay more attention today the words of Jefferson, Franklin, and Adams on the subject of education, it was Webster who most explicitly addressed and directly influenced the civic education of the time. In the introduction to his first

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[36] See Chatman 1978

[37] Designated by Elkins and McKitrick 1993 as 1788 to 1800

[38] Elkins and McKitrick 1993, pp. 693-694, 739-740

[39] Herson 1984, pp. 38-39

[40] also Kaestle 1983; See Pangle and Pangle 1993

published book in 1783, Webster argues that the time has come to establish an American cultural identity:

> Previously to the late war, America preserved the most unshaken attachment to Great Britain. The king, the constitution, the laws, the commerce, the fashions, the books, and even the sentiments of Englishmen were implicitly supposed to be the *best* on earth. Not only their virtues and improvements, but their prejudices, their errours [sic] , their vices, and their follies were adopted by us with an avidity. But by a concurrence of those powerful causes that effect almost instantaneous revolutions in states, the political views of America have suffered a total change. She now sees a mixture of profound wisdom and consummate folly in the British constitution; the ridiculous compound of freedom and tyranny in their laws; and a few struggles of patriotism, overpowered by the corruptions of a wicked administration. She views the vices of that nation with abhorrence, their errours with pity, and their follies with contempt.[41]

The challenge facing Webster and others was not merely the dissemination of knowledge about moral and virtuous behavior, but the development of a presentation -- an appropriate narrative form -- that would meet the needs of teachers and students in the post-Revolution context. As noted previously, developing narrative forms involves making choices about both content and the way it will be expressed,[42] and if the intent of the expression is to influence the targeted population, the nature of the audience needed to be taken into account. With this in mind, Webster (along with Jefferson and others) felt the most appropriate means for communicating the moral-laden content of knowledge was through the study of the English language, i.e. spelling, grammar, and general reading. An added factor in shaping the classical civic education narrative was that the "principal part of instructors are illiterate people and require some easy guide to the standard of pronunciation, which is nothing else but the customary pronunciation of the most accurate scholars and literary gentleman."[43]

As for substantive content, the narrative would be shaped by two factors. First, civic humanism and Puritanism both accepted the idea that good and moral behavior followed basic principles -- principles that can be communicated directly through aphorisms and catechisms. Second, the conscious effort by Webster and others to assert a distinct American cultural identity and perspective created an awkward situation. For while they perceived an urgent need to break the hold of British culture, there was nothing of a national or "continental" nature to fall back on. Thus, there was little in the

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[41] Webster and Babbidge 1967, p. 20

[42] Chatman 1978, chapter 1

[43] Webster and Babbidge 1967, p. 23

way of national historical content to fill the narrative form. Relying on local or regional "stories" or heroes would be as counterproductive to Webster's goals as relying on English history, manners, and customs. In the immediate post-Revolution era, patriotic emotions might fill the void. But by 1787, Webster understood that such emotionalism was a temporary phenomenon: "the spirit and principles which wrought our separation from Great Britain will mostly die with the present generation; the next generation will probably have new habits of obedience to our governments; and habits will govern them with very little support from law."[44]

Cultivating such habits of obedience required the conscious effort to develop an "American" curriculum using relevant courses and texts. Moreover, this material needed to be attractive to the contemporary American student:

> The collections which are now used consists of essays that respect foreign and ancient nations. The minds of youth are perpetually led to the history of Greece and Rome or to Great Britain -- boys are constantly repeating the declamations of Demosthanes and Cicero or debates upon some political question in the British Parliament. These are excellent specimens of good sense, polished style, and perfect oratory; but they are not interesting to children. They cannot be very useful, except to young gentleman who want them as models of reasoning and eloquence in the pulpit or at the bar.
>
> But every child in America should be acquainted with his own country. He should read books that furnish him with ideas that will be useful to him in life and practice. As soon as he opens his lips he should rehearse the history of his own country -- he should lisp the praises of liberty and all those illustrious heroes and statesman who have wrought a revolution in his favor.[45]

But for Webster and his contemporaries, civic education had a more advanced objective as well. It was not merely educating obedient citizens that concerned them, but also the need to educate the good *republican* citizens. "An acquaintance with ethics and with the general principles of law, commerce, money, and government is necessary for the yoemanry of a republican state.... It may be true that all men cannot be legislators, but the more generally knowledge is diffused among the substantial yoemanry, the more perfect will be the laws of a republican state."[46]

Thus, the classical civic education narrative was associated with a conscious effort to use schooling both to create the virtuous citizen and to institutionalize a distinct American culture. It relied on the fundamental textbooks of the time, i.e. spellers,

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[44] Webster and Babbidge 1967, p. 70

[45] Webster and Babbidge 1967, p. 84

[46] Webster and Babbidge 1967, p. 86

grammar texts, and school readers. Filled with aphorisms and proverbs intended as guidelines for living the moral life, the schoolbooks stressed biblical and American values. It was the foundational narrative form upon which U.S. civic education would be built for the next century.

The Mythic Narrative: It is difficult to indicate any specific turning point in the civic education narrative from its classical to mythic form. Webster's texts and their basic narratives remained widely used for more than a century. Revisions in the narrative content of the spellers and grammar books were to be expected given Webster's own concerns for keeping the books "interesting to children." As important was the emergence of competitive readers, especially west of the Allegheny Mountains. Most famous among these were McGuffey readers which were often used in conjunction with the revised Webster spellers. Thus, for the growing number of children receiving public schooling, the expressive vehicle for the civic education narrative did not change -- it came primarily (although not exclusively) through English class lessons.

Generally speaking, the mythic civic education narrative can be dated from the first decades of the 19th-century. In part, the shift in narrative coincided with the change in the public attitude toward schooling. It was the era of common-school reform,[47] and education was taking on additional meaning at the community level. Lawrence A. Cremin[48] summarized the functions of schooling during the decades preceding and immediately following the Civil War:

> The school performed many functions: it provided youngsters with an opportunity to become literate in a standard American English via the Webster speller and the McGuffey readers; it offered youngsters the common belief system combining undenominational Protestantism and nonpartisan patriotism; it afforded youngsters and elementary familiarity with simple arithmetic, bits and pieces of literature, history, geography, and some rules of life at the level of the maxim and proverb; it introduced youngsters to an organized subsociety other than the household and church that observes such norms as punctuality, achievement, competitiveness, fair play, merit, and respect for adult authority; and it laid before youngsters processes of reasoning, argument, and criticism -- indeed, processes of learning to learn -- that were more or less different from thought processes proffered earlier and elsewhere.

The most obvious change in the narrative form during this period, however, was in content -- and the changes emerged in a direction predicted and advocated by Webster many years earlier. The change was most evident in the stories about America and American heroes found with increasing frequency in essays and other classroom

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[47] Kaestle 1983, chapter 6

reading materials. Consider the following (all too familiar) comments about George Washington drawn from a McGuffey's volume:

> As he [Washington] was free from envy, so he had the good fortune to escape the envy of others, by standing on an elevation which none could hope to attain. If he had one passion more powerful than another, it was love of his country. The purity and ardor of his patriotism were commensurate with the greatness of its object. Love of country in him was invested with the sacred obligations of a duty; and from the faithful discharge of this duty he never swerved for a moment, either in thought or deed, through the whole period of his eventual career.
>
> First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen, he was second to none in humble and endearing scenes of private life. Pious, just, humane, temperate, sincere, uniform, dignified, and commanding, his example was satisfying to all around him, as were the effects of that example lasting.[49]

Such portraits of Washington and other heroes of the new Republic began to emerge very early in the 19th century. Biographies, such as Parson Mason Locke Weems' **A History of the Life and Death, Virtues and Exploits of General George Washington** (first published in 1800), helped build a body of civic myths that eventually overtook the simpler proverbs and catechisms of classical civic education narrative forms. Most important for the present argument, this new content, as distorted and false and exaggerated as it may seem, was consciously designed as such. For Weems and others, youngsters needed more than lessons on the principles and rules of moral life; they needed role models as well. As did Plato in **The Republic**, the civic educators of antebellum America considered the noble lie appropriate. As important was their belief that youngsters found such stories enthralling.

Most of the myths at the heart of this narrative form focused on historical figures -- from individuals such as Washington and Jefferson to the collective that we still tend to call the Founding Fathers. That reliance on historical persons, however, should not be confused with the use of more objective historical content. As Michael Kammen has documented, antebellum America was hardly preoccupied with formal history or tradition. In fact, there was considerable anti-history sentiment among those committed to democracy. "Some of the most striking and strident tendencies in American culture during the antebellum period -- millennialism, utopianism, come-outerism, perfectionism, and especially evangelicalism -- were not compatible with customary modes of religious and social organization. Adherents of these movements were far more interested in

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[48] Cremin 1977, p. 51

destiny than in history."[50] The acceptance -- indeed the promotion -- of exaggerated characterizations of Washington and the other Founders was perceived as a means to provide models for democratic citizens rather than a means for creating and disseminating a historical record. In fact, early 19th century history textbooks were unapologetically filled with large quantities of "pure fiction."[51]

From 1840 until the Civil War, the mythic narrative became increasingly nationalistic. The historical content increased, but the stress remained on those selective and romanticized events that highlighted military victories and projected a glorification of America's destiny. Morris Janowitz, quoting a study of civic textbooks during that period, notes that "the superiority of America" was a "conspicuous theme" throughout.

> History was for inspirational purposes. The duties of the citizen were not spelled out. Practical information on citizenship developed only after World War I. Given the background of the typical student, the symbols -- the flag and the flag salute -- were as important as textual materials. Civic education was mainly oriented to fashion and generalize sentiments of patriotism and affiliation with a larger society.[52]

For Cremin, schooling during this period was intended to advance the creation of an American *paideia* -- a vision of American life as a "cultural and ethical aspiration."[53] This reflected an implicit assimilationist agenda, fostered in part by the growing number of immigrants who did not fit the traditional mold, i.e. British or Scottish. The relative success of this approach was already evident to de Tocqueville when he commented on the "irritable patriotism" he found in United States. "A foreigner will gladly agree to praise much in their country, but he would like to be allowed to criticize something, and that he is absolutely refused."[54]

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[49] Minnich 1975, p. 108

[50] Kammen 1991, p. 50

[51] FitzGerald 1979, pp. 48-49 As we note above, Weems is a case in point. He is often viewed historically as the creator of myths and perpetrator of somewhat harmless falsehoods. Placed in the context of a civic education agenda, his actions were perhaps somewhat nobler than we might think at first blush. See Fliegelman 1993, p. 122 . For Weems, the value of Washington was more than what he contributed to the country as a public official; it was also what he represented to future generations as a private individual of high character and virtue. Weems had to resort to fantasy and embellishment to create the needed effect, but he did so without much criticism from others.

[52] Janowitz 1983, p. 84

[53] Cremin 1977, pp. 19, 83-87

[54] Tocqueville 1969, p. 237

The Progressive Narrative: The third civic education narrative to emerge in United States represented a more significant change in both content and expressive form. Over the period of its dominance from the 1870s to the 1920s and 1930s, it took two major forms. At first it was found in the pages of history textbooks, but eventually found expression in a plethora of "civics" texts that appear at the turn of the century.

Various dates can be noted for the shift toward the history-based progressive narrative. Cremin[55] regards 1876 as a watershed year, for it marked the first major celebration of the nation's birth. Previous anniversaries had been noted but hardly widely celebrated. Kammen observes "that historical comparisons became popular and commonplace" early in the 1870s. What characterized these new references to history, however, were not nostalgia, but a progressive view of the country and its destiny.[56] Christopher Lasch, a critic of the progressive narrative, highlighted the difference: "If the idea of progress has a curious effect of weakening the inclination to make intelligent provision for the future, nostalgia, its ideological twin, undermines the ability to make intelligent use of the past."[57] Nostalgia does play a significant role in debates among the cultural elite in the late 1800s, with the Jeffersonian agrarian ideal held in high esteem. But it is the progressive narrative that dominates civic education during the period from the 1870s until the 1930s.

At the outset, the progressive narrative required a shift from the moralistic stories and catechisms of Webster's speller and McGuffey's readers to the lessons of history textbooks. But this form of history wasn't merely the inspirational or nationalistic history that started to emerge in the 1840s and 1850s.[58] Rather, it was an approach to history that would endure for more than a century. Frances FitzGerald summarizes the qualities of that progressive narrative form in her remembrance of the history books she read in the 1950s:

> Ideologically speaking, the histories of the fifties were implacable, seamless. Inside their covers, America was perfect: the greatest nation in the world, and the embodiment of democracy, freedom, and technological progress. For them, the country never changed in any important way: its values and its political institutions remain constant from the time of the

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[55] Cremin 1977 Kammen 1991, p. 49, notes that the 50th anniversary of the Constitutional Convention in 1837 passed rather quietly -- even in the nation's capital

[56] Kammen 1991, p. 135

[57] Lasch 1991, p. 82

[58] For a sense of how history is view by its leading practitioners in the late 1850s, see Lieber 1993, especially pp. 22-23

> American Revolution. To my generation -- the children of the fifties -- these texts appeared permanent just because they were so self-contained. Their orthodoxy, it seemed, left no handholds for attack, no lodging for decay. Who, after all, would dispute the wonders of technology or the superiority of the English colonists over the Spanish? Who would find fault with the pastorale of the West or the Old South? Who would question the anti-Communist crusade? There was, it seemed, no point in comparing these visions with reality, since they were the public truth and were those quite irrelevant to what existed into what anyone privately believed. They were -- or so it seemed -- a permanent expression of mass culture in America.[59]

In tracing the roots of the progressive history textbook, FitzGerald sees the 1890s as a watershed decade. Not only was the knowing inclusion of fiction made taboo, but stylistic changes became evident. The writing was more "terse, declarative" -- "orderly to the point of compulsion."

> Gone are the eccentricities of style and the old piling up of events on dates; their material is organized into themes, such as "The English Colonies" or "The Rise of Parties," the significance of each theme being stated as bluntly as possible in the chapter heading. The books give much less space to battles and much more to politics, economics, and governmental undertakings of all sorts. Institutions appear amid the welter of events -- though formation of the Republic now has a significance equal to that of the Revolutionary War -- and personalities are fleshed out slightly with description and pertinent anecdote. Finally, the books sound a new note of restraint. The authors clearly have their opinions, but they do not force than adjectively upon their readers. The books have a tone of objectivity and authoritativeness. That tone is, of course, spurious -- a pure formality. But seen in retrospect the assumption of this impersonal voice was as important an innovation in the history of textbooks as the discovery of perspective was is in the history of painting. From the eighteen-nineties on, what the text said about American history would appear to children to be the truth.[60]

Among the most notable of many progressive historians was Charles A. Beard, and the narrative emerging from his work is indicative of that which influenced civic education of the time. Beard's **An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States** (1913) can be seen as a cynical analysis of the American founding. But in that and later works, Beard is actually providing historical evidence to prove that life in United States has indeed progressed. This perspective comes through more clearly in The **Rise of American Civilization**, first published in 1927. With his wife, Mary, Beard used a technique that tended to highlight what had changed for the better since colonial times. They also gave a prominent role to the impact of the "idea of progress" in American history**;**[61] and in the 1933 edition they set forth the idea that American society

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[59] FitzGerald 1979, p. 10

[60] FitzGerald 1979, pp. 51-52

[61] Beard and Beard 1933, pp. 444-447, 828-831

is bound for even greater achievements despite the setbacks of an oncoming Depression.[62]

But the most explicit statement of the form of history relevant for the progressive civic education narrative was found in the works of John Dewey at the turn of the century. In **The School and Society**, originally published in 1900, Dewey dismisses the value of teaching history-for-history-sake in primary schools. "The past is the past, and the dead may be safely left to bury its dead. There are too many urgent demands in the present, too many calls over the threshold of the future, to permit the child to become deeply immersed in what is forever gone by."[63] Where history has value in the common school curriculum is when it serves the needs of social education.

> Whatever history made be for the scientific historian, for the educator it must be an indirect sociology -- a study of society which lays bare its process of becoming and its modes of organization. Existing society is both too complex and too close to the child to be studied. He finds no clues into its labyrinth of detailed and can mount no eminence whence to get a perspective of arrangement.
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> If the aim of historical instruction is to enable the child to appreciate the values of social life, to see in imagination the forces which favor and allow men's effective co-operation with one another, to understand the sorts of character that help on and that hold back, the essential thing in its presentation is to make it moving, dynamic. History must be presented, not as an accumulation of results or effects, a mere statement of what happened, but as a forceful, acting thing. The motives -- that is, the motors -- must stand out. To study history is not to amass information, but to use information in constructing a vivid picture of how and why men did thus and so; achieved their successes and came to their failures.[64]

The association of history textbooks and the progressive narrative with civic education first became explicit in practice in 1883 when a program was established in Boston's North End to teach new immigrant children about local and national history. In 1889, a meeting in New York City to discuss enhancing the teaching of American history rationalized such a move by citing the "immense influx of newcomers who knew nothing about the United States."[65] A decade later, Charles F. Dole wrote a book intended for the "young citizens" of New York that included instructions to teachers revealing the purpose behind these programs:

> [The content of this book] must not be presented as task work. It would defeat the purpose of the book to divide it into lessons. The aim of the... teacher should be to awaken the natural

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[62] Beard and Beard 1933, pp. 831-837

[63] Dewey 1990, p. 150

[64] Dewey 1990, pp. 150-151

[65] Kammen 1991, pp. 245-246

> interest of the children in the things that concern the city and the nation. The only need is that the child shall understand what he reads. Encourage him to ask questions and to talk about the topics treated in the book; also to report and describe whatever he can see with his own eyes or learned for himself about any of these subjects. Develop his sense of pleasure in being a citizen and in looking forward to a citizen's duties. Encourage especially the warm ethical and patriotic feeling, which moves instinctively with the growing consciousness of the child, that right and wrong are involved in politics. Let him see the ideals of cleanliness, public safety, prosperity, and happiness, for the attainment of which governments exist, and he will never easily descend to base and dishonorable conduct. Be sure that he grasps the idea not only that the State is for the sake of the individual, but also that the individual lives for the State; that duties go with rights; that there is no lasting satisfaction except in generous and public-spirited conduct.[66]

By 1900, New York, Massachusetts, Illinois and several other states had mandated the teaching of U.S. history in their high schools -- and by 1915 it was almost a universal requirement throughout the country. There were criticisms that the reliance on history in civic education would create "half a nation of irrational jingoes,"[67] but those attacks fell on deaf ears.

If the mythic narrative was intended to promote assimilation, the progressive narrative was intended to foster acculturation. Aimed primarily at the new immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe, the progressive civic education narrative stressed the promise of a better life in America for those who would take advantage of the opportunities provided by this new culture. It wasn't a matter of being shamed or coerced into forsaking one's parents or heritage, but instead *choosing* to become part of the mainstream of American economic life. This meant more than merely learning English or being a virtuous individual. It also meant knowing -- and, in a sense, becoming part of -- the progressive flow of American history.

Janowitz attributes the popularity of progressive approaches to civic education to the work of a dedicated group of intellectual reformers who played a pivotal role in shaping school curricula during the 1890s and early 1900s. The influx of immigrants initially stirred up a nativistic reaction that began to strengthen the use of the mythic narrative in civic education. But the influential work of the Chicago school of sociology, the social work movement, and educational reformers such as Dewey popularized an approach to civic education that acknowledged the important role played by ethnic

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[66] Dole 1899, pp. vii-viii

[67] Edward Eggleston, quoted in Kammen 1991, p. 246

identities[68] in the Americanization process. "The early intellectuals concerned with ethnicity realized that a homogeneous 'Americanized' society was neither a short- nor a long-term possibility, nor even desirable."

> They did not want a society in which each person had to be inscribed himself overtly as a member of a particular ethnic formation. They recognized that the outcome of the process of acculturation would be strongly influenced by the performance of the school system, voluntary associations, and the expanding mass media. They helped to fashion education and social work designed to assist acculturation based on recognition of ethnic differences. In particular, they took into account that the recent immigrant to the United States found himself most frequently at the bottom or near the bottom of the social structure.[69]

The history-dominated progressive narrative did begin to change, however. The ultimate civic education objective of the progressive agenda was to engage the citizenry in the practical affairs of their community, and history textbooks were not sufficient to achieve that. Those who taught courses on American history and government soon found themselves devoting more time to describing governments and eventually they had to establish separate courses under the "civics" title. In the early 1900s, the civics textbook developed as a supplement and eventual alternative to the historical expression of the progressive narrative. The new civics approach tried to deal with these concerns within the progressive worldview of the time. Perhaps indicative of this effort, Waldo H. Sherman prefaced his 1905 book, **Civics: Studies in American Citizenship**, by noting that:

> There has been for some time a growing feeling among educators that more efficient and direct work should be done in high and secondary schools along the line of citizenship training, which is presumably the aim of all public school instruction. In many of these schools the subject of Civics, when not entirely left out, has been treated with such indifference as to make no lasting impression on the minds of students. In some instances, the only presentation of this subject comes in the grammar school, and many text-books therefore have been adapted in style and character to the age and mind development of grammar school students. This means that what knowledge the students gains of government, its principles and institutions, comes to him at an age when his nature is dependent in character, and makes the less appeal to him on this account. When the pupil has reached the high school, he has started on a course of independent thinking and action; his mind and feelings are tempered by the adolescent period, and he is ready, as a factor rather than as a ward in the government of his country, to consider the claims of citizenship.
>
> The military features of the government are early and practically made use of in teaching and fostering the principles of military patriotism, but the patriotism thus gained does not usually extend itself in the thought or action to the principles, institutions, and ideals of the government itself. In military patriotism the underlying thought is protection of home and

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[68] As Janowitz notes, the concept of "ethnicity," while appropriate in describing what occurred in the progressive era, is really a term of the 1960s.

[69] Janowitz 1983, p. 88

> country in case of war; but in a nation curbing rather than fostering warlike tendencies, the energies of war should be made subservient to the reign of peace, inspiring loyalty to the institutions, principles, and ideals which have made the nation great.
>
> To teach and inspire civic patriotism -- love for the civic order of society -- students must be brought face to face with citizenship problems, for it is only by arousing thought on this subject that an intelligent, enlightened, and inquiring citizenship can be developed.[70]

It is important to note that the break from the history textbook approach involved more than merely a descriptive overview of the structures and functions of American governments. Sherman also included material for conducting a classroom simulation allowing students to organize themselves as the government of the town called "Collegeville." This pedagogy is found in other works as well. For example, more than 15 years later, high school instructors from Melrose, Massachusetts would publish a civics book designed to introduce newly enfranchise women students through a series of classroom "dramatizations."[71] These efforts are precursors of the modern narrative that would soon come to the fore.

This was also an era when civic life blossomed through the creation of many organizations -- from the Boy Scouts to every conceivable form of community association. These associations were somewhat different from those that formed in the past. Civic associations of the past had been more closely associated with secret societies (e.g., the Masons and the original KKK). The new associations of the progressive era were quite different in two related respects: their open public standing and the importance attached to their participation in national celebrations. Becoming a member of these new associations was not only not secret, but in fact gave one a special status in the community. And whatever else the associations might do for their members or for the immediate community, it was their presence at patriotic events and parades that was central to their identity. The progressive narrative in civic education was merely part of the significant changes taking place in American social and political life at the time.

The Modern Narrative: Applying the label "modern" to the next civic education narrative is an arbitrary choice among several possibilities. I could just as effectively used the term "rationalism" or "rights-based" to characterize the images central to this narrative. It is a narrative that stressed the qualities individuals need to be responsible

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[70] Sherman 1905, pp. v-vi

[71] McPheters, Cleaveland, and Jones 1921

and active participants in the political system. A knowledgeable, informed, tolerant and skeptical citizen -- one deferential to the rights of others and capable of making choices after critically assessing and debating alternatives -- was the ideal at the heart of this perspective.

The emergence of the modern civic education narrative is also closely tied to the history of American political science. According to David Ricci and other chroniclers of the discipline, the political science profession was born with a firm commitment to improving America's civic life. It established three paths for fulfilling this obligation: through research, through training government professionals, and through civic education activities.[72] In its early years, the profession took the civic education function seriously, as evidenced in the many presidential speeches and APSA reports devoted to the subject. Most important for purposes of this paper, was the image of the good and responsible citizen that permeated their efforts.

Among the many leaders of the field who addressed the issue, Charles E. Merriam was a major force in helping define the role of civic education for the profession. In addressing the question of educating citizens in the 1920s, he argued that it "is not yet clear, to be sure, what it is that we wish to teach or just what the process of education shall be."

> In point of fact, much of the secondary education of the world is not adapted to develop political science or intelligence, but to intensify nationalistic or class traditions, in such a manner as to breed war and conflict. Secondary political education is employing the agencies of history and government to make sober and impartial judgment impossible on the part of the generation that is coming on. It is distressing to observe that in the greater part of the world the education of the youth is not in the science but in the prejudices of government, steeping them in special hatreds and special forms of bitterness. If political education is a form of training in prejudice or even hate, the inevitable outcome will be a low state of governmental action and a low level of governmental attainment. Here as perhaps nowhere else the services of genuine political science are needed and may effectively be brought to bear in the struggle against ignorance and bigotry as the guides of human life.[73]

While acknowledging that the resulting "scientific technique of citizenship" might be misused, Merriam saw greater difficulty in trying to determine the "traits of citizenship which it is desirable to inculcate."

> We may well ask, what are the specific qualities of citizenship to be taught? Is there a standard upon which there is general agreement? What are the requisite qualities of

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[72] Farr, Dryzek, and Leonard 1995; Ricci 1984 , especially Leonard 1995

[73] Merriam 1970, pp. 286-287

> effective citizens? Do these qualities relate to information, to power of analysis and investigation, to judgment formation, to selfish or social types of reactions? What are the obstacles to efficient citizenship? Are they physical, psychical, social, economic? Can these obstructions be located and diagnosed, and can they be measurably trained and controlled? What are the job specifications for an efficient citizen? These are points at which scientific inquiry might be of the very greatest scientific value; and where we may, in fact, look for significant developments in the near future.[74]

In an effort to provide in empirical answer to the first of those questions, Merriam reviewed studies of citizen training in several countries and found the following common themes: patriotism and loyalty; obedience to the law; respect for government and public officials; recognition of one's political obligations; a minimum degree of self-control; responsiveness to community needs in stressful times; "knowledge of and agreement with" the legitimating national ideology; and "special beliefs in the qualities of one's own people compared to others."[75] While the list did not include any mention of rationality or critical thinking, that was a core -- and even defining -- characteristic of the good citizen, American style.

As Ricci points out, Merriam and his contemporaries were greatly influenced by the work of John Dewey. By the 1920s and 1930s, Dewey had shifted his attention to the role of education in democracy, and as a consequence his work had considerable (albeit indirect) influence on questions of citizenship training.[76] Patriotism and high moral qualities are not enough in modern democracies. Citizens must be "intelligent" as well, and for Dewey that meant exercising judgement through an "approximation" to the scientific method.[77] The educator's objective -- whether he or she is teaching science or math or civics -- is to enhance the capacity of the student to "think" correctly. The ideal had been set forth even earlier in **How We Think**, originally published in 1910. There Dewey established "five phases, or aspects, of reflective thought" on problems: (1) suggestions about possible solutions, (2) "intellectualization" or study of the problems, (3) developing a "guiding idea" or hypothesis, (4) "reasoning" using logic or mathematics if possible, and (5) "testing by overt action" to verify the hypothesis.[78] Transposed to the civic education arena, this became the standard for how a good citizen operates.

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[74] Merriam 1970, pp. 288-289

[75] From Merriam's 1931 work, The Making of Citizens, cite in Lane 1972, pp. 277-278

[76] Dewey 1966

[77] Dewey 1963, pp. 71-73; Ricci 1984, pp. 101-107

[78] Dewey 1910, pp. 106-116

Such intelligence became central to the concept of the "responsible citizen." In addition, there still remained a strong bias toward stressing the obligations civic life as well. While the duties and obligations of citizens had been an inherent part of previous narratives, especially through the promotion of patriotism, it was not regarded as problematic until the turn of the century.[79] Charles Merriam was especially concerned about the tendency of Americans to emphasize their rights as citizens while downplaying their obligations.[80] By 1941, this theme in civic education had manifested itself as a criterion that the responsible citizen was "sensitive" to the rights and needs of others. The obligation of citizenship in the modern civic education narrative had expanded during the Depression to encompass social as well as legal and political concerns.

> Certain aspects of American culture in past decades have been strongly colored by a rampant individualism which sought self-gain, accompanied by general indifference to the rights and needs of other less fortunate American citizens. Individualism has been a strong motif throughout American history. In its stimulation of private enterprise and creative imagination, in its strengthening of a spirit of independence and love of liberty, its contributions to our culture can not be underestimated. In certain spheres, however, particularly that of economic gain, it has furnished the basis for ruthless exploitation....
>
> The responsible citizen who is sensitive to the society of which he is a part is an observer of social movements and problems. His aim is to live socially and to realize increasingly the social implications of his conduct. To use and oft-quoted phrase, he has a "social conscience." *Acceptance of the predominance of human values in all situations and under all circumstances is a primary characteristic of the thoughtful citizen*. A nation's quality and success are for him to be measured solely with reference to this criterion. He will consistently apply this standard to situations surrounding him in present-day society.[81]

Thus, both the content and expressive form of the modern civic education narrative was constructed around the core idealization of the responsible citizen as a thoughtful (i.e., rational) and socially sensitive individual. Over the past six decades there has been more consistency and consensus about the expressive forms of the modern narrative than about its content.

The view of classroom instruction as the primary vehicle for transmitting the narrative did not change significantly. Anthropologist Ruth Benedict addressed the special nature of American civic education in 1943 by noting that the country's "democratic heritage" is a fundamental component of its culture. "In contrast to

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[79] For example, see Bryce 1909

[80] See Janowitz 1983, pp. 146-148

[81] Mosher, Beyle, and Maxwell Graduate School of Citizenship and Public Affairs 1941, pp. 4-5, emphasis in original

European and South American nations, the United States from the first has had a tradition of liberty and opportunity, and despotic power has been at a minimum." But the way we raise our children poses a problem for the "transmission" of the heritage.

> The transmission of our democratic heritage means primarily… preparing children in our schools to act as adults with initiative and independence. Our culture does not go about this with the directness that is characteristic of many tribes which set this same goal. With us, children are dependent, and yet as adults they must be independent. They are commanded as children, and as adults they command. This is in strong contrast to those societies which make no qualitative differences between children and adults... Such tribes do not have the problem we have in our culture: the unlearning of dependence and docility when the child reaches man's estate. Nevertheless, this discontinuity in the life-cycle is basic in our culture, and we have used it to good advantage. We greatly prolong infancy, and we define it as a period of learning. We give ourselves, therefore, the opportunity to equip our children with all that a long-continued and uninterrupted course of teaching can give them. We do not always take full advantage of our opportunity, of course, but the opportunity is there. The child on the threshold of manhood has spent years sitting at the feet of the older generation, and his teachers have had a remarkable chance to pass on to him all they know and value.
>
> One great danger we face under this system is not that the child will be rebellious or insufficiently docile -- but that he will learn his lesson in docility to well. Our schools impose the school schedule, the subject matter, the personnel, the forms of discipline; in all these matters the child takes what is offered.... But the training is overwhelmingly in docility rather than in self-reliance and independence, and many adults have obviously been over influenced by this training.... Progressive education, with its greater encouragement of the kind of behavior the child will need as an adult in our culture, is clearly on the right track.[82]

Benedict's reference to "Progressive education" does not reflect the narrative form we have labeled progressive in this analysis, but instead the "modern" theory of education that had emerged out of the earlier movement.[83]

As Frances FitzGerald notes in her analysis of history books, the legacy of the progressive historians remains a powerful force in the U.S. history courses through at least the 1950s. The major changes occurred in courses specifically devoted to civics. By the 1930s, they were replaced in the high school curriculum with courses in "social problems." "This book," state the authors of the 1926 text titled **The New Social Civics**, "is designed to meet the needs which until the present time have been served by community civic texts, although the present volume is broader in scope than the ordinary community civics." It

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[82] Benedict 1966 pp.68-69

[83] "The triumph of progressive education consisted largely in the fact that by the mid-1940s it was no longer referred to as progressed in education blocked as ' modern education,' the 'new education,' or simply, 'good educational practice.' Ravitch 1983, p. 43

> ... gives less attention to the mechanics of government and more to be great social problems of the day. It is, in fact, a *social civics*.
>
> **New Social Civics** is a unification, not of knowledge, but of life's activities. The material centers, not in any one line, but about life itself. It is intended to help the pupil to locate himself in regard to his manifold social-civic relations. Never before it was there so much necessity for developing in students the notion of action and reaction in all lines of activity -- the realization that we are, without knowing it, caught in a network of social forces, no one of which is independent of the others. This conception of the universal relation of political, industrial, economic, moral, and religious activities is the poll toward which true progress moves....
>
> Both the method of presentation and the materials selected aim to develop the proper attitude of mind toward the great social-civic problems of our day. If only a healthy mental attitude and a deep interest can be created in the student, the future will take care of itself. It is out of knowledge and facts that attitudes which control destiny are created.[84]

Here the "Deweyist" perspective was most clearly in evidence, for these "social-civic problems" courses were intended not only to raise the consciousness of students about problems facing American society, but also to give them an opportunity to discuss the issues and possible solutions rationally. It was a means for applying the "experimental" approach to civic life on the assumption that the lessons learned about civic duty and participation would carry over to the real world.

But the single course approach would not suffice in the modern narrative where the intent was to shape the future citizen's approach to all of life's problems. As a result of this more inclusive perspective on the civic education of children, educators developed the "social studies" curriculum aimed at creating better citizens.

Diane Ravitch points out that institutional "curriculum making" first makes an appearance among education professionals in 1918.[85] It reflected a more holistic approach to education, stressing the use of all subjects to achieve the general purposes of schooling. Since educating good citizens was a common and pervasive goal for public schools, the curriculum could be an effective vehicle for presenting a well-formed civic education narrative.

Donald W. Oliver credits the work of the American Historical Association's Commission on the Social Studies with advancing broader this civic education approach. Between 1932 and 1942, the Commission issued volumes of reports in an ongoing effort to build the social studies curriculum aimed at educating good citizens who live in a

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[84] Phillips and Newlon 1926, p. vii

[85] Ravitch 1983, pp. 49-57

"good society." The "... fundamental purpose of instruction in the social studies," they stated, "is 'the creation of rich, many-sided personalities, equipped with practical knowledge and inspired by ideals so that they can make their way and fulfill their mission in a changing society which is part of a complex world.'"[86]

The modern civic education narrative did not cultivate a uniform content. A number of approaches developed over time, some more "substantial" than others. With the setting for the modern civic education narrative placed in the general social studies curriculum, the content would necessarily reflect the national and professional priorities of the time. There seemed to be two components of the content, one focused on America in the international arena and the other on the domestic side.

At first, the commitment to fight despotic enemies determined a good deal of the narrative content. In the late 1930s and through the Second World War, the narrative content stressed the value of democracy relative to the authoritarianism rampant in Europe. The thrust of that narrative content was retained as the Cold War began to preoccupy Americans. Consider the advice about curriculum design offered in 1953 as part of a series on social studies teaching by the National Council for the Social Studies:

> Under current world conditions a central focus in high school social studies instruction should be on the present struggle between freedom and slavery, democracy and dictatorship. Youth need to know and have faith in the basic ideals upon which we have built our democratic republic. They need to have the knowledge and competence necessary to preserve and extend these ideals in the current conflict with communism, fascism and other forms of authoritarianism.[87]

In the same document, however, there is an equally strong assertion about how a "good citizen" relates to other Americans. This is most clear in the report's list of what "most Americans believe in:"

> 1. A universe ordered by natural and moral law in which man has some control over his own destiny and in which what he is and does is important.
>
> 2. The dignity and infinite value of all individual human beings regardless of race, creed, national origin or economic circumstance.
>
> 3. Equality of opportunity for every individual to develop and use his potentialities.
>
> 4. Freedom for the individual to worship, speak, write, assemble, petition and exert his initiative in useful work.

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[86] Oliver 1966, p. 101-102

[87] Quillen 1953, p. 101

5. The team method of cooperating as groups of equals in the solution of common problems and the promotion of common concerns, either directly or through elected representatives.

6. The use of reason rather than prejudice or force in solving problems and getting things done.[88]

Where the mythic narrative had assimilationist agendas, and progressivism fostered acculturation, the modern narrative's emphasis on social sensitivity would promote efforts to accommodate differences.

At its simplest, the internationally-focused component of the modern narrative would stress "us against them" and "our system is better than their system" themes. But a number of factors worked against this content. First, the content itself was spread thin over the range of social studies courses that high schoolers had to take during their three years in secondary school. Second, the modern narrative's core value of rational and critical thinking inevitably lead to challenging the "good guy/bad guy" image of the Cold War content. Third, exposure to other sources of information (especially television news and its coverage of Vietnam in the 1960s) would necessarily raise questions about the credibility of any curriculum that seemed contradicted by the "reality" of U.S. government behavior. And finally, the end of the Cold War would eventually undermine such content.

On the domestic side, the content was no less unstable. Mirroring the integrationist norms that dominated the education establishment during the height of the civil rights movement, the narrative promoted a "melting pot" theme that had its roots in the progressive era. But the movement toward accepting diversity and multiculturalism as desirable social norms would directly impact on the modern narrative. Perhaps even more than in law, civic education (as manifest in the social studies curriculum of the 1970s and 1980s) would stress accommodating "differences."[89]

But there was still another form of content -- actually, anti-content -- characteristic of the modern civic education narrative. In his critical assessment of contemporary civic education, Morris Janowitz focuses on the approaches emerging from the halls of academe, especially from a political science that had become increasingly "behavioral" in its orientation. In fact, it would be more to the point to say that mainstream political science was promoting a "non--narrative" view of civic life, and thus made little in the

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[88] Quillen 1953, p. 101-102

way of contributions to civic education until the 1990s. Janowitz is critical of the lack of attention given to such ideas as patriotism, obligation, and duty in mainstream political science research. He rightly characterizes the approaches as negative and "near nihilism" which relied on "myth smashing" and critical analysis.[90]

> In effect, civic education became mainly the study of a series of discrete "social" and "political" problems plus an overview of contemporary patterns of political participation and attitudes. Appeals to patriotism were no longer heard, and little attention was paid to the appropriate reformulation for an interdependent world community. The political message that generally emerged was that increased political participation was an essential goal. Political and election sample surveys were used in the study of specific social and political problems. In essence, after 1945, at both high school and university levels, the "civics" approach gave way increasingly to a "behavioral science" analysis of contemporary society.[91]

Despite the influence of the behavioral movement, there were (as noted at the outset of this paper) individuals who actively pursued the civic education agenda although they seemed relegated to the periphery of the discipline. They generally fell into two camps. One, led by R. Freeman Butts, pursued an approach that stressed knowledge about government institutions, political processes, and effective participation in the political system. The other, associated with the study of political socialization in children, took a broader approach to defining civic life and the arena for civic education. In contrast to Butts' "civic-learning" approach, the "sociocivic-learning orientation" made nongovernmental and non-political institutions an appropriate focus for educating citizens.[92] Despite differences in the two approaches, the fundamentals of the modern civic education narrative remained the same, i.e. the good citizen is knowledgeable, informed, and rational in the choices here she makes politically and socially.

As civic education has reemerged in 1990s, the power of the modern civic education narrative is in evidence everywhere. Two documents are exemplary. In 1991 the Center for Civic Education, published **CIVITAS**, a "framework for civic education" authored by a panel of scholars and educators in conjunction with a committee of prominent civic leaders. Funded with grants from public and private sources, it was intended to reinvigorate the teaching of civics in elementary and secondary schools. Its rationale speaks to the nature of the ideal citizen and by implication how that ideal should be achieved.

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[89] See Minow 1990; Minow 1997 Also see Ravitch 1983 chapters 4-5

[90] Janowitz 1983, chapter 6

[91] Janowitz 1983, p. 145

> Civic education in a democracy is education in self-government. Self-government means active participation in self-governance, not passive acquiescence in the actions of others....The ideals of democracy are most completely fulfilled when every member of the political community actively shares in government....The first and primary reason for civic education in a constitutional democracy is that the health of the body politic requires the widest possible civic participation of its citizens consistent with the common good and the protection of individual rights. The aim of civic education is therefore not just any kind of participation by any kind of citizen; it is the participation of informed and responsible citizens, skilled in the arts of effective action and deliberation. [93]

The second document, also sponsored by the Center for Civic Education, puts forward "National Standards for Civics and Government" in K-12 classrooms. Issued in 1994, the standards aim at a clear objective:

> The goal of education in civics and government is informed, responsible participation in political life by competent citizens committed to the fundamental values and principles of American constitutional democracy. Their effective and responsible participation requires the acquisition of a body of knowledge and of intellectual and participatory skills. Effective and responsible participation also is furthered by development of certain dispositions or traits of character that enhance the individual's capacity to participate in the political process and contribute to the healthy functioning of the political system and improvement of society.[94]

However, the rekindled focus on civic education has also generated criticisms and alternatives to the modern narrative. The critiques range from those commentators (e.g., Allan Bloom[95]) who regarded it has merely one more manifestation of the bankrupt nature of modernism in general, and contemporary liberalism in particular. Still others, such as Morris Janowitz, find fault with the overemphasis on rights relative to duty and obligation as fundamental parts of citizenship.[96] From a different perspective, the modern civic education narrative is inherently supportive of the current regime and its policies. For them, there needs to be a greater appreciation of the tumultuous and emotional nature of civic life in the democracy.[97] In the middle are those who believe the problem has not been with the modern narrative per se, but instead with those who have failed to implement its primary objective of enhancing citizen rationality. For Amy Gutmann, the blame lies with teachers who failed to focus on the students critical reasoning abilities.

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[92] Dynneson and Gross 1991, pp. 22-27

[93] Portions of the rationale cited in Butts 1995

[94] Education 1994

[95] Bloom 1987

[96] also see Glendon 1991; Janowitz 1983; and Schneider 1998

[97] Engel 1998; Ryan 1997

> The ability [to reason about political matters] is so the central to democratic education that one might question whether civics courses that succeeded in increasing political trust, efficacy, and knowledge but failed to increase the ability of students to reason about politics were indirectly repressive. How can a civics course legitimately teach teenagers to trust their governments more without also teaching them to think about what kind of government is worth trusting?
>
> If history and civics courses do not teach students to reason about politics, we should perhaps be grateful that they are not a major source of political socialization. Perhaps it is inevitable that they are not. Most theories of child development converge on the conclusion that early socialization shapes the fundamental moral and political values of children to a much greater extent than subsequent schooling. This conclusion is compatible with the claim that history and civics courses can and should teach democratic virtue, so long as we understand democratic virtue to include the willingness and ability of citizens to reason collectively and critically about politics. However students have been socialized outside of school, there should be room within school for them to develop the capacity to discuss and defend their political commitments with people who do not share them.[98]

What most of these critics have in common is their advocacy (implied and explicit) of finding an alternative to the modern narrative. In the next section I consider one such alternative.

A POSTMODERN NARRATIVE?

In considering an alternative to the modern civic education narrative, I return to the question of "What if Marshall McLuhan was right?" What if the civic education of the future has to deal with a new type of student, a "nomadic gatherer of knowledge" or one of Tapscott's N-Geners? The response could be one of three types.

We could take the path that seemed to be taken by Noah Webster and Parson Weems; that is, we can start with the assumption that the material we use must be interesting to the intended audience. Although we look back with disdain at the simple proverbs and stories of Webster's spellers and the outlandish lies fostered by Weems and others, the fact is that the creators and perpetrators of the classical and mythic narratives knew what they would doing and why they would doing it. They had a sense of what they wanted to accomplish in both moral and social terms, and they were realistic about the capacity of children (as well as teachers) of their era to handle the material. The same can be said for the civic educators of the progressive era. While constrained by norms that would not allow them to knowingly fabricate history, their presentation of material in classroom textbooks was designed to serve civic education needs.

Or we could take the opposite path and regard the narrative as the ends rather than a means. We see this implied in the modern civic education approach. The relative weakness of any story content in the modern narrative is a reflection of the rationalistic vision the modernists sought to promote -- some might say impose -- through the civic education curriculum. The volumes of empirical studies indicating the relatively insignificant impact of school-based civic studies on students -- on their political knowledge, level of political trust, or their sense of political efficacy -- beg at least one of two conclusions. Possibly, as Gutmann argues, the teachers failed to use the classroom opportunity effectively. Or perhaps the idealized "responsible citizen" is an inappropriate narrative for civic education purposes; that is, it has no attraction, in narrative terms, for the students. If the latter is the case, and if the rational citizen narrative is itself the objective for educating citizens, our only viable alternative would be to develop an authoritarian approach to imposing the rationalist narrative on the audience. This puts us in the strange position of *demanding* that students learn to be open minded and rational.

The third approach can be synthesized from the middle ground between those two options. We need to consider both the audience and the message. Deferring entirely to either would be a mistake. Regarding the message, there needs to be a renewed discussion of what it means to be a "good" citizen. We seem to be having that discussion, both in academe and the public arena. However, the fact that citizenship is historically contingent -- that the standards of civic life for one generation are not necessarily relevant to those of another -- must be factored into the debate. Whatever the nature of citizenship is determined to be -- even if it remains close to the modern ideal -- the means for effectively transmitting it must be taken into account.

The characteristics of the N-Geners studied by Tapscott and Turkle are useful starting points. But we need to know more than how they view the world or their attitudes on specific issues. Perhaps more than previous generations, we need to understand that population in context. What are the features of their learning environment that foster their perspectives?

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[98] Gutmann 1987, pp. 106-107

Turkle's discussion of this group provides us with a contextual framework in the form of postmodernism. We have moved, she argues, from a "culture of calculation" to a "culture of simulation":

> The lessons of computing today have little to do with [rational] calculation and rules; instead they concern simulation, navigation, an interaction. The very image of the computer as a giant calculator has become quaint and dated. Of course, there is still "calculation" going on within the computer, but it is no longer the important or interesting level to think about or interact with.[99]

Instead, acting and interacting in the computer environment requires an ability to deal with symbols and icons and metaphors of difference sorts.

Steven Johnson argues that the computer is not like its mechanical predecessors (e.g., the printing press, the camera) and their reliance on the "cause-and-effect" machinations of hardware components. Rather, the computer is

> a symbolic system from the ground up. Those pulses of electricity are symbols that stand in for zeros and ones, which in turn represent simple mathematical instruction sets, which in turn represent words or images, spreadsheets or email messages. The enormous power of the modern digital computer depends on this capacity for self-representation.
>
> More often than not, this representation takes the form of a metaphor. The string of zeros and ones -- itself a kind of language, though unintelligible to most humans -- is replaced by a metaphor of a virtual folder residing in a virtual desktop. These metaphors are the core idiom of the contemporary graphic interface.[100]

Metaphorical thinking is hardly uncommon outside the context of "cyberspace."[101] But the powers of metaphors are different in the world of McLuhan's nomads, where they stand as the defining paradigms for social life and interactions. Johnson puts it in terms of the "cultural import of interface design":

> Put simply, the importance of interface design revolves around this apparent paradox: we live in a society that is increasingly shaped by events in cyberspace, and yet cyberspace remains, for all practical purposes, invisible, outside are perceptual grasp. Our only access to this parallel universe of zeros and ones runs through the conduit of the computer interface, which means that the most dynamic and innovative region of the modern world reveals itself to us only through the anonymous middlemen of interface design. How we choose to imagine these new online communities is obviously a matter of great social and political significance.[102]

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[99] Turkle 1995, p. 19

[100] Johnson 1997, p. 15

[101] Lakoff 1987; Lakoff 1996; Lakoff and Johnson 1980

[102] Johnson 1997, p. 19

While Turkle, Tapscott and others have been helping us better understand the emerging nomads/N-Geners, MIT humanities professor Janet Murray has been considering the kind of narrative forms the new technologies are generating or are likely to generate. In the process she offers a useful framework for understanding the context. In her **Hamlet on the Holodeck** (1997), Murray highlights for "essential properties of digital environments."

First, these digital environments are inherently *procedural*. That is, those pulsating zeros and ones operate through the execution of a series of rules. "To be a computer scientist is to think in terms of algorithms and heuristics, that is, to be constantly identifying the exact or general rules of behavior that describe any process, from running a payroll to flying in airplane."[103] Second, they are *participatory*. "Procedural environments are appealing to us not just because they exhibit ruled-generated behavior but because we can induce the behavior," notes Murray.

> They are responsive to our input. Just as the primary representational property of the movie camera and the projector is the photographic rendering of action overtime, the primary representational property of the computer is the codified rendering of responsive behaviors. That is what is most often meant when we say that computers are *interactive*. We mean they create environment that is both procedural and participatory.[104]

Third, the digital environments are *spatial* -- that is, they can represent many forms of navigable space. "Linear media such as books and films can portray space, either by verbal description or image, but only digital environments can present space that we can move through."[105] The implications of this feature are already being felt in the economy as well as in government operations.[106] At the level of the individual, the creation of digitized navigable space can radically alter learning styles, and thus pose a significant challenge/opportunity for educators.[107]

Finally, the digital environments are *encyclopedic*. "Computers are the most capacious medium every invented, promising infinite resources."

> Because of the efficiency of representing words and numbers in digital form, we can store and retrieve quantities of information far beyond what was possible before. We have extended human memory with digital media from a basic unit of portable dissemination of

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[103] Murray 1997, pp. 71-72

[104] Murray 1997, p. 74, emphasis in original

[105] Murray 1997, pp. 79-83

[106] See Cairncross 1997

[107] Brickell 1993

> 100,000 words (and average book, which takes up about a megabyte of space in its fully formatted version) first to a 65,000,000 words (a 650-megabyte CD-ROM, the equivalent of 650 books) and now to 530,000,000 million words (a 5.3 gigabyte digital videodisc, equivalent to 5,300 books), and on upward. Once we move to the global databases of the Internet, made accessible through a worldwide web of linked computers, resources increase exponentially.[108]

If Murray had used news or current affairs in their various formats (e.g., text, audio, video), the numbers would have been even more staggering depending on what was being counted. Clearly, the Internet has a potential to handle even greater volumes of information than is now online, and its potential as an archive of public affairs and other civic-relevant data cannot be exaggerated.

What emerges from this complex and dynamic environmental context is more than information or metaphorical interfaces. Murray posits three major "aesthetics" created by the digital environments that can have considerable influence on those who experience them: immersion, agency, and transformation.

Murray defines "immersion" as a metaphor representing the sense or "feeling" we experience psychologically "from a plunge in the ocean or swimming pool: the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality, as different as water is from air, that takes over all of our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus." As with other aesthetics, it is possible for individual to just lay back and enjoy the sensations; but "in a participatory medium, immersion implies learning to swim, to do the things that the new environment makes possible."[109] For most adults who approach the Web environments "later" in life, the immersive aesthetic is somewhat limited. Those who "plunge in" are typically seeking expressive outlets or perhaps even relief from the "normal" patterns of modern life.[110] For the N-Geners, however, immersion may well provide the foundational context for their intellectual and social lives.

Complementing immersion is the aesthetic Murray labels "agency." Agency is more than the ability to interact through various "input devices" (e.g., the mouse, a joystick). It involves the "participatory pleasure" one gets from being able to maneuver within the immersive navigable space created on digital environments. By analogy, she compares agency in cyberspace with the feeling one gets by playing the sport of

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[108] Murray 1997, pp. 83-84 Also see Dertouzos 1997

[109] Murray 1997, pp. 98-99

[110] Dery 1996; Turkle 1995 especially Part III

"orienteering." "Constructing space and moving through it in an exploratory way (when done for its own sake and not in order to find the dentist's office or the right airport gate) is a satisfying activity regardless of whether the space is real or virtual." Again, for the older generation of computer users, the agency aesthetic is experienced through participation in games or the elaborate online communities known as MUDs (multi-user dimensions).[111] Debates over the implications of this digital aesthetic have divided both the critics and defenders of the new cyberspace culture. Some regard it as a source for greater freedom and leverage against corporate and governmental domination. Others see it as a means for enhancing the individual's role in the larger community and its institutions.[112] The potential impact of the agency aesthetic on those "growing up digital" has yet to be thoroughly or systematically explored. Tapscott's efforts to articulate the impact N-Geners will have on all aspects of social, economic, and political life[113] is a good starting point, for his conclusions raise empirically testable questions. There is little doubt, however, that the agency aesthetic will create a different environment of standards and expectations among those who grow up immersed in it. As Murray contends, it will help reshape the effective narratives of the future.[114]

The third salient aesthetic noted by Janet Murray is "the pleasure of transformation."

> Computers offer us countless ways of shape-shifting. Using "morphing" software, we can transform faces so seamlessly that a grinning teenage boy melts into a haggard old woman, as if under a magic spell. Putting on a virtual reality helmet, we earthbound interactors find ourselves transmuted into soaring crows. The computer captures processes, and it therefore is always suggesting processes to us even when it is just displaying information. Anything we see in digital format -- words, numbers, images, moving pictures -- becomes more plastic, more inviting of change.[115]

While the transformation aesthetic may be dismissed as little more than the source of playfulness in its short-term implications, we need to consider how it is likely to effect the cognitive perspectives of N-Geners and beyond. Developing a capacity to consider alternative futures and outcomes, being able to shift one's identity and perspective, and being comfortable while engaging in these transformative experiences -- this is the likely

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[111] Turkle 1995, especially, pp. 11-14

[112] Doheny-Farina 1996, chapter 2

[113] Tapscott 1998

[114] Murray 1997, chapter 5

[115] Murray 1997, p. 154

situation the N-Geners face. It would amount to nothing less than a psychological empowerment of a generation. And its implications for educating that generation are equally significant, especially in our efforts to enhance their civic-mindedness.

Having set out the major characteristics of the new digital environments (procedural, participatory, spatial, and encyclopedic) and considered the aesthetics involved (immersion, agency, and transformation), Murray turns to the central question of her book: what is the future of the narrative in the world of arts? More specifically, she addresses the question of authorship and how the artistic expression of individuals will manifest itself.[116]

Our concerns are likely to be perceived as considerably more mundane. We share with Murray and other students of all arts a concern for the narrative. But the narrative that challenges us is the one found in the future civic education classroom -- that is, assuming the classroom, or even the school house, will be the appropriate location for our efforts.

In one important respect, the challenge facing artists of the future is less daunting. Artists have license to assume realities that social scientists and teachers do not. The postmodern world raises a fundamental challenge to the modernist foundations of our profession. Postmodernism, through its attack on "authorship" and "causality," would make the assertion of historical or social scientific truth vulnerable to challenge.[117] However, the fact that postmodernism is capable of providing useful insights into the way people think and patterns of human relationships render it a valuable tool that should not be ignored.

Kenneth J. Gergen has been using postmodernism with considerable success in rethinking the perspectives of psychology. Like Turkle and Murray, he finds the postmodern perspective extremely useful in understanding the emerging consciousness and personalities of the late 20th-century. It has provided insights the modernist perspective could not.[118] Nevertheless, the irrationality and potential superficiality

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[116] Murray 1997, chapter 10

[117] Rosenau 1992, pp. 31-34

[118] "The social saturation brought about by the technologies of the twentieth century, and the accompanying immersion in multiple perspectives, have brought about a new consciousness: postmodernist. In its retrospective stands, it is skeptical, doubting the capacity of language to represent or inform us of what is the case. For if language is dominated by ideological investments, its usage governed by social convention, and its content guided by literary style, language does not reflect or mirror reality. And

bothers Gergen-the-prominent-social-scientist -- just as our acceptance of this perspective might bother those of us searching for an effective approach to civic education. He deals with the problem by engaging in the game of "what ifs": "If we give postmodern discourse an opportunity to expand, to make use of the available resources of the language, are there positive outcomes for the society in terms of practices and potentials? If we momentarily step outside our traditional perspectives, and test the waters of the postmodern alternative, is there reason for encouragement? There is, after all, good reason for making the attempt."[119]

In the end, Gergen emerges from his exercises in applying the postmodern perspective optimistic about its insights and utility. Similarly, we need to explore the potential usefulness of the postmodern perspective on designing a new narrative for American civic education. The emergence of N-Geners -- those nomadic gatherers of knowledge -- gives us "good reason for making the attempt."

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if language is not truth-bearing, then the very concept of objective reporting is rendered suspect. It this is so, there are no objective grounds for saying that people possess passion, intentionality, reasons, personality traits, or any of the other ingredients of the romantacist or modernist world views. All such concepts are socially and historically contingent, the products of political and ideological forces, self-protective communities, and literary or aesthetic fashion. With the spread of postmodern consciousness, we see the demise of personal definition, reasoned, authority, commitment, trust, the sense of authenticity, sincerity, believe in leadership, depth of feeling, and a faith in progress. In their stead, an open slate emerges on which persons may inscribe, erase, and rewrite their identities as the ever-shifting, ever-expanding, and incoherent network of relationships invites or permits." Gergen 1991, p. 228

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